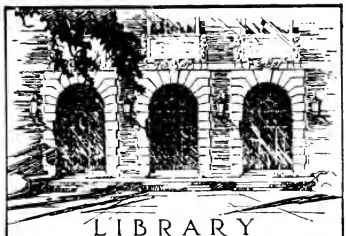

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# NELLY BROOKE.

A HOMELY STORY.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,
(MRS. ROSS CHURCH.)

"Love is strong as death."

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.

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RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
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# NELLY BROOKE.

## CHAPTER I.

### NELLY IS TAKEN TO TASK.

Dr. Monkton returned from London on the following morning, in anything but a desirable temper. He had been summoned there, to a consultation concerning some surgical operation, by men who had full faith in his judgment; but on their meeting to discuss the case, it happened that he totally differed in opinion from them, respecting the treatment to be pursued. The other doctors were all agreed; Dr. Monkton alone was obstinately assured that they were mistaken. However, as he was in a minority of one to three, and the danger was imminent, his advice was put on one side. The operation was performed,

and being successful, he was proved to have been altogether in the wrong.

This was what had galled him: he would rather the patient had died twenty times over, so that he might have triumphed above his colleagues. As it was, the self-gratulations of the other men sent him back to Hilstone in the worst of tempers.

He would have liked to have poisoned them all three, but as that was impracticable, he parted with them as politely as ever, and returned home to vent his ill-humour on the first person who should be so unfortunate as to offend him.

When James Monkton has been elsewhere described as a passionate man, the term bore allusion to his temperament, and not to his temper. A warm temper usually accompanies a warm heart: quick words and quick repentance go together; and a cold-blooded person who is slow to wrath is generally slow to forgiveness also. It was thus, unhappily, with Nelly's husband.

He was not hasty to take umbrage because so few things had the power to touch his feelings. At the same time, where he had once been offended, he never forgot the injury. He was so narrow-minded that he could make

no allowance for actions engendered by a difference of disposition, and he had so little generosity that he had never been known to confess that he was in the wrong.

It was his nature to cherish resentment even to malice, but he shewed his policy in this particular by only oppressing such as were weaker than himself.

Like his sister, he was no real friend to animals, or children, or even women, except where his own advancement or gratification was concerned.

He could be bland and gentle in the extreme, with a Mrs. Filmer, or a Mrs. Brooke, however annoyed he might feel at being called up in the middle of the night because either of them fancied she had a pain in her little finger; but he could speak harshly to a dying woman or child, for whose sake he had been troubled in like manner to inhale the unpleasant fumes of an ill-ventilated cottage.

He prided himself on the care which he took of his well-bred and well-fed horses, and his leash of valuable greyhounds, whilst he could kick a poor half-starved mongrel over the threshold of the cottage above alluded to, or strike a costermonger's unoffending donkey athwart the nose, and smile to hear the howl

of the one animal, or to see the shudder with which the other would silently remonstrate against such needless cruelty.

He forgot, or rather he had never possessed a heart large enough to comprehend the truth that if our love for animals springs from a generous wish to protect the weak and defenceless, it will be extended to the whole brute creation, and be more largely drawn upon in behalf of the unfortunate than the prosperous. But to revert to his behaviour on the morning he returned to Hilstone.

He had met his wife with less warmth than usual, although he had been unable to find fault with the beaming, cheerful face, which had welcomed him home. He had only cut her rather short when she was volubly describing their pleasure of the evening before, and Nelly had thought that he looked tired and worried, and laid it to the fatigue and anxiety which he had probably gone through. She was perfectly aware that one half of the life of a professional man must be a sealed book to his wife; and was too sensible to make any enquiries that might annoy her husband. But she had not the least idea that his silence proceeded from ill-temper; and after he had finished breakfast, saw him enter his consult-

ing-room, with full belief that his cheerfulness would be restored by luncheon-time.

There were several poor patients waiting to consult him about such trifling ailments as their babies' blotches, or their own small pains and aches ; but he found so much fault with the first two or three for troubling him with such nonsense that the remainder shrunk together, and looked almost afraid to speak.

Long, who, in his capacity of confidential servant, usually attended in the room on these occasions, and who had seen too much of his master's moods not to know what was the matter with him, went from one group to the other, entreating the people, if their business was urgent, to speak up at once, and if not, to leave it until another day.

"The doctor's been up the whole night," he said to one woman who seemed to require a reason for the demand, "and is very tired, as well as in a great hurry. I daresay your baby's eyes won't be any the worse for waiting till to-morrow morning, Mrs. Brown."

"Well! they may, or they may not," grumbled the mother as she prepared to move off again, "but if so be they are, I can but take him up to Dr. Nash, who wouldn't refuse to see a suffering child at any hour. He never

neglects the poor for his own convenience, bless 'im," but before the concluding words had escaped her lips, the door was luckily closed upon her and several of her companions; and the rest of the gratis patients having been summarily disposed of, Long and his master found themselves alone.

"Don't let anybody else in," said Dr. Monkton quickly, as footsteps were again heard in the hall, "I can see no more to-day."

"But you *must* see *me*, James," exclaimed the shrill voice of Mrs. Prowse as that lady appeared upon the threshold, "it is absolutely necessary that I should speak to you, and at once. Long! leave the room!"

Under the eye of his master, Long dared not even hesitate to obey the imperative command, and in another moment he was gone.

"What do you want with me, Matilda?" demanded the doctor, without looking up from the papers with which he was occupied, "I am very hurried, and must tell you I have no time to waste upon nonsense."

He would gladly have dismissed her as peremptorily as she had done his servant, for he was too sullen to desire converse with anyone, but firmly as he could hold his own with

most people, Dr. Monkton stood rather in awe of his sister.

That man must have assurance indeed, who can afford not to feel somewhat afraid of such a woman's tongue.

"*Nonsense!*" echoed Mrs. Prowse, "I wish you may find it nonsense! If Mrs. Filmer once takes it into her head to call in Dr. Nash, you may pack up your things and be gone, for there'll be an end to all your practice here."

At these words, her brother almost forgot his sulks in his amazement.

"What *are* you talking about?" he enquired.

"I'm talking about what all Hilstone is talking about at this present moment, James; and about what would never have happened if you had thought fit to consult me before taking a step, as you used to do. But everything is changed now; and I trust you may find it changed for the better! You rush off to town higgledy-piggledy, without saying a word to anyone, or leaving a single order or direction behind you—and this is the consequence."

"Am I to understand," demanded the doctor, interrupting her, "that you expect me to

ask your opinion before I make a professional engagement; or your leave before I start to fulfil it?"

"No! of course not," replied Mrs. Prowse with unabated warmth, and not in the least checked by the severity of her brother's tone, "but before you trusted the maintenance of your name and respectability to the hands of a child, you might, and you ought to have ascertained that she was equal to the charge."

"I suppose you are alluding to my wife," he remarked indifferently.

"Yes, I *am* alluding to your wife," was the caustic reply, "and it would be a good thing for you, James, if I were the only person who had occasion this morning to allude to her."

"Why, what has she done?"

"What has she *not* done?" cried Mrs. Prowse. "Shewn the utmost rudeness and incivility to Mrs. Filmer and her daughter, and offended them so highly that I doubt if they will ever be persuaded to enter your doors again."

At this news Dr. Monkton's countenance visibly lowered. His sister could have told him nothing regarding his wife to cause him greater annoyance. He prided himself on the exclusiveness with which he usurped the

best practice of Hilstone, and was well aware that all his good fortune in this respect arose from his connection with the deanery. If Mrs. Filmer chose to take offence at any behaviour on the part of himself or his wife, he knew that he might as well (as Mrs. Prowse had said) pack up his things at once, and be gone. All his indifference fled at once. He lay down his papers and advanced to where his informant was seated, fanning herself, from heat and agitation.

"You cannot be in earnest, Matilda," he said quickly. "Helena is too sweet-tempered to shew rudeness to anyone. What did she do, or say? and when did it all happen?"

"It happened during your absence of yesterday," replied the canon's wife, delighted to see how keenly his interest was aroused; "and I can vouch for the truth of it, for I was present myself. Mrs. Filmer took the trouble to send over in the morning and tell your wife that she intended calling on her in the afternoon, but Mrs. Monkton, it seems, preferred taking a drive instead, and it was therefore merely by chance that she had a couple of minutes to bestow upon her visitors when they made their appearance. Such behaviour, at all events, as dear Mrs. Filmer

remarked to me afterwards, possessed the charm of novelty, for it is the first time that she has ever been treated in that way in Hilstone before."

"Perhaps Helena did not receive the message," remarked the doctor with knitted brows.

"I carried it to her myself, James."

"But since she was at home surely Mrs. Filmer might have staid more than a couple of minutes if she had wished it."

"'*If she had wished it?*' Do you think it likely that *Mrs. Filmer*, the leading lady of Hilstone, would condescend to *wish* to prolong a visit, which if considered as an honour, was decidedly not treated as such. Why, the first words your wife uttered were to complain that she had been kept from her drive by the delay in their appearance; and then she went on to speak to Mrs. Filmer in the most extraordinary manner; just as if she were anybody! openly refused to join the choral society, and mentioned Mr. Rumbell and Dr. Nesbitt in such familiar terms, that I cannot recall them without indignation. All I know is, that Mrs. Filmer remarked to me afterwards, that she had never met with a more forward and unpleasant young person. And that is a

nice thing to be said of one's brother's wife by the daughter-in-law of the dean. I'm sure I cried with shame when I heard it."

Dr. Monkton's thin lips were compressed firmly, and his face was growing darker every moment.

"I must speak to Helena about this," he said with ominous brevity.

"Speak to her! well, I should rather hope you would, James, and if you wish to retain your friends, you must do something more than speak to her. You have chosen, without consulting anyone, to marry a mere girl from the country, who appears to be perfectly ignorant of what as your wife is required from her; but that is no reason why you should let your reputation go to rack and ruin in her hands. She has been here a week, and she has done you enough mischief to last a year. But I knew how it would be, directly I heard that you had saddled yourself with that cripple."

"Why, what of him?" asked her brother in surprise. "What can he have had to do with the present business?"

"Everything," returned Mrs. Prowse with emphasis, "you must be blind if you cannot see that the wishes and opinions of that

young man rule your wife. I suppose you think you're her master, but you'll never be that so long as her brother is in the house. Why, a child might see how she is guided by him. It was nothing yesterday but 'my *brother* wished it,'—'my *brother* would have been disappointed,'—'my *brother* is waiting,' and so it is in all things. That boy is everything and you are nothing, and I believe she married you more for his sake than for her own."

This shaft, though fired at random, was so unfortunately true, that it made Dr. Monkton furious. He had known from the commencement that he influenced Nelly only through his conduct to her brother, but it was a hard truth to hear from the lips of another.

"Take care what you are about!" he exclaimed, sharply turning to his sister. Her sallow face turned whiter at his address, and her hard black eyes gleamed sternly at him, but she only tossed her head, and replied:

"Well, if it isn't true, anyone would think so."

"That is my business, and not yours," he said severely.

"And that brute of a dog, too," ran on Mrs. Prowse, attempting to change the cur-

rent of his thoughts, "no one who had any regard for you or for your property, would keep an animal like that about the house. Mrs. Filmer was astonished—perfectly astonished—at seeing it in the hall yesterday, and said she wondered at anyone expecting a lady to enter the same place with it. However," continued the canon's wife as she rose and shook out her skirts, preparatory to leaving, "I considered it my duty to inform you of the circumstance, and you must do as you please regarding it. All I can say is, that I sincerely hope your wife's extraordinary behaviour may not be permitted to influence the cordiality with which the canon and myself have always been received at the deanery. If I perceive any alteration in dear Mrs. Filmer's manners towards us, however, I shall know who to thank for the change. One cannot touch pitch without being defiled." And without waiting to explain whether her quotation bore allusion to Mrs. Filmer, Nelly, or herself, Mrs. Prowse jerked out of her brother's room.

As soon as she was gone, Dr. Monkton sat down to collect his thoughts, and resolve upon his actions. As he did so, his anger grew deeper and deeper against the cause of his

annoyance. As long as his sister had been in the room, irritating him by her observations, it had been chiefly directed towards herself; now that she had disappeared, it reverted to his wife. He had never felt disposed to be harsh with Nelly yet, there had been so little time and so little reason for anything but caressing her; but now, his dread of decreasing popularity, and the sting which some of Mrs. Prowse's words had left behind them, added to his previous ill-humour, combined to raise a mood which was destined to surprise her.

After the reflection of a few moments he rose suddenly and rung the bell for Long, and the request "Ask your mistress to step here for a minute," was soon followed by the appearance of Nelly herself. She had been just going out with her brother, and was arrayed in her walking things. She came in with a smile on her lips, half curious and half expectant, for she could not conceive why her husband should send for her during his business hours, and just behind her, treading on and rending with his weight her muslin dress, appeared her constant attendant, Thug.

"Do you want me, James?" she naturally, though perhaps unnecessarily, asked.

"Yes; or I should not have sent for you," was the discouraging reply, and then as she closed the door, and he perceived the mastiff by her side, he added, "I wish to heavens, Helena, that you would not take that animal with you wherever you go. *You* may like your rooms to smell like a stable, but it is more than I do."

The look—the manner—the tone of voice, were what she had never experienced from him before. Nelly started, and changed colour—but the next moment she had re-opened the door, and ordered the dog into the passage.

"I am sorry," she said gently, "I am very sorry, James, that he annoys you, I had no idea of it."

"It would annoy anyone," he answered, "to have a brute like that always at his heels. The wonder is, that you can like it yourself."

"But how can I prevent it?" she said with a look of perplexity. "He has never been used to be alone, you know, and he *will* follow me everywhere. But I will take care he does not come in your room again. He must learn to stay entirely in Bertie's or mine."

"He ought not to be in any room at all," grumbled the doctor, "his proper place is the stable. However, I have something of much

greater importance to speak to you of now, Helena. What on earth can you have meant by your treatment of Mrs. Filmer, yesterday?"

"My treatment of Mrs. Filmer?" said the girl, advancing close to her husband's side. "*How* did I treat her, James?"

"Infamously, if what I hear is true. You refused to remain at home to receive her after she had sent you an intimation of her coming, and when by chance, you met her, you behaved so rudely, that both she and her daughter have declared that they will never enter the house again."

"But who says that I was rude?" demanded Nelly, with wide open eyes.

"My sister," replied Dr. Monkton.

"Then it is a shame of her! it is a great shame," exclaimed his young wife, indignant at the exaggeration which had been used respecting her conduct of the day before. "I was not rude at all, James! I am sure I was not. I waited at home an hour and a half on purpose to see Mrs. Filmer, and when she came I talked to her as I would have done to any other lady. She was very disagreeable in her manner towards me though, and I was sorry afterwards that I had put off our drive

for her sake. I am sure it was no pleasure to see her; and I won't do it another time."

Now, although Dr. Monkton had sent for Nelly with the intention of being very angry with her, her sweet aspect and gentleness of manner had at first almost disarmed him. But this last bit of rebellion recalled him to a sense of his duty.

"But you *must* do it another time, Helena! you must behave far better another time than you have done this. I have sent for you now expressly to remonstrate on such conduct. What arrangement can you possibly have made that you could not have put off until to-day, or to-morrow?"

"Why, didn't you say yourself, before you went to London," replied Nelly with the most charming pout, "that we might have the carriage and go to Coombe Wood?"

"Pooh! Coombe Wood!" retorted the doctor, "any day would have done for Coombe Wood. You must understand at once, Helena, that Mrs. Filmer is a very important person in Hilstone; and that it is absolutely necessary that you keep on friendly terms with her. She has it in her power to make or break anybody here."

"But we had made all our arrangements

before I even heard she was coming," urged Nelly. "We had set our hearts upon going to Coombe Wood, and it would have been such a terrible disappointment to us, to give it up altogether."

The plural pronoun, in his present state of mind, jarred upon James Monkton's ear.

"*We*," he repeated, "who are *we* ?"

Of course he knew as well as she did, but he made the demand with the sole view of bringing the cause of complaint prominently forward.

"Why, Bertie and me, of course, James," replied Nelly, staring at such a question.

"That's just it!" he said, eagerly seizing the opportunity which her answer afforded him. "*We* should have been disappointed, and therefore the expedition could not be deferred until another day ; if it had only been *your* convenience which had been called in question, you would have been ready enough to comply with my sister's advice. Now, I'll tell you what it is, Helena, your attention to your brother is all well enough in its way, but I'll not have it interfere with your attention to my friends, nor your obligations as the mistress of this house. From this time society will make certain calls upon you to which you

must respond irrespective of any self-imposed duty to Robert; he has already monopolised the best part of your life, the rest belongs to me."

"But, James," she began falteringly.

"I wish to hear nothing more upon the subject," he answered decisively, as he prepared to leave the room. "As long as Robert remains with us I am willing to give him every luxury which my means can afford, but that does not include your company whenever he chooses to command it. If you had not, by your devotion, rendered him utterly selfish, he would be the first to see the necessity of a change. He has the old woman to attend to his wants, and the man to take him out for his airings; what more can he desire? Any way, except when entirely at liberty to dispose of your own time, he cannot have my wife. So do not let me have to speak to you again on this subject." And passing through the open door, Dr. Monkton left Nelly to her own reflections.

## CHAPTER II.

### AND RESOLVES TO DO HER DUTY.

At first they were very bitter ones. It was not her husband's angry looks or words that she so much resented (though she had little expected, and thought she little deserved them) as the knowledge that they had been induced by his sister's unjust representations. She believed, that, had it not been for them, the doctor would never have thought of objecting to her care of Bertie, or of imagining that it interfered with her courtesy to his friends. For the moment she hated Mrs. Prowse, hated Mrs. Filmer, hated Hilstone, and almost everybody in it. But Nelly was too sweet tempered to cherish such vindictive feelings long. It was but a little while before better thoughts arose, but a few minutes spent on the sofa, where her husband had left her, before she was ready silently to acknowledge that she might not have been sufficiently conciliating in her manner towards her new

acquaintances; that she ought, perhaps, to have appeared to value their attentions more, and her own and Bertie's pleasures less; that she was, after all, but a very unimportant personage in comparison with Mrs. Filmer, who was a married woman of so many years' standing; and had been mistress of the Deanery nearly as long. Nelly felt all this, and resolved, in consequence, that she would do her duty better for the time to come, but how far her ready compliance was attributable to her new-born fear, perhaps even she was incompetent to decide. Yet, she knew that she was afraid, she could hardly tell of what. The terms in which Dr. Monkton had spoken of her brother rankled in her heart. She could not forget them; she could not shake off the distrust which they had engendered, nor lose the remembrance of who had prompted him so to speak.

She felt that it was necessary for both their sakes, that she should yield implicitly to her husband's wishes—even though dictated by his sister; but she yielded under protest.

It was the obedience of fear, not that of love! When Nelly left her husband's consulting room, on that morning, to join her brother, she had conceived a dread from which

she was never after wholly free; a dread, which though almost undefined, had still the power grievously to oppress her.

She told herself again and again, that her fears were futile, that her husband's words had meant nothing—that no one had the desire or the capability to part her from her brother, so long as Bertie expressed a wish to remain at her side.

Yet the trouble was unallayed, and from that day she began to watch him with more than her former solicitude.

She told him but little of what Dr. Monkton had said to her; she would have been afraid to repeat that part which related to himself. When he rallied her upon the length of her absence, and asked whether a doctor's consulting room was a proper place to make love in, and what the patients had thought of her intrusion; she gently silenced him with the remark that the interview had not been such as to render it a fit subject for jesting.

"James is vexed, I am sorry to say, at my not having made a more formal business of receiving Mrs. Filmer and her daughter, yesterday. It seems that she is a very important lady in Hilstone, much more so than I had

any idea of, and if I offend her, I may do him harm."

"And pray, who took the trouble to tell him about it?" demanded Bertie.

She was walking by the side of his wheeled chair at the time, and they had ordered the man who conducted it, to turn into one of the pretty quiet lanes, by which Hilstone was surrounded.

"Mrs. Prowse, I believe," replied Nelly, in a low voice.

"The interfering old cat!" exclaimed her brother, between whom and the canon's wife there already existed a mutual antipathy; "what business is it of hers, I should like to know? why doesn't she keep to her own house, and leave you to receive your visitors as you choose. I thought she had come for no good when I saw her smirking behind the other old woman, yesterday."

"Oh, hush, Bertie!" said Nelly, in a warning whisper; "pray don't speak so loud—the man will hear you."

"And what if he does?"

"He must think it so strange, darling, considering the connection between us; besides, these things get repeated, and if it should come back to James's ears, or her own, that

you had mentioned her in those terms—only fancy!"

"Only fancy—what, Nelly? What harm could Mrs. Prowse do me that I did not choose to accept at her hands? She must even keep a civil tongue in her head, if it comes to that, for it's your house, and not hers; and you could order her out of it, any day, if she made herself disagreeable."

Nelly sighed, and knew not what to answer. How could she tell him what she feared herself—that Mrs. Prowse had so much influence over her brother, and so few scruples as to the method of using it, that she was far more likely to prove the means of turning Bertie out of the house, than to be turned out herself.

Bertie's temper was so uncertain; and his false pride was so little under control, that he would at once insist upon testing the truth of her supposition, and probably bring about the very disagreement between her husband and himself, which, from the manner in which the doctor had spoken of him that morning, she had reason to apprehend would not be difficult.

Whilst she was debating how she should caution him not to offend the canon's wife,

Thug, who always walked so close by her side as almost to impede her footsteps, thrust his nose into her hand, and then jerked it upwards, as much as to say, "notice me."

"She objects to Thug," said Nelly, dejectedly.

"What, Monkton's sister? Well, let her object, then, Nell! The dog is yours, not hers; and for my part, I shall in future order him to lie down right under her nose, whenever I have an opportunity."

"Oh, no! dear Bertie! pray don't," exclaimed his sister, fearful of the mischief her remark might create. "She may not be so accustomed to animals as we are, you know; and though Thug is a darling, it is not everybody that would like him in the house. And I don't know why I should say that it is Mrs. Prowse who particularly objects to him. It was James himself, who said he made the room smell like a stable, this morning—but I fancied that his sister—"

"Of course she is at the bottom of it," interrupted Bertie, "when did Monkton ever object to Thug before? why, he used to say, at Little Bickton, that the dog would be an ornament to any house, and that it was a pleasure merely to look at such a noble animal."

"And so it is," exclaimed Nelly, as she stooped to caress her favourite, "but still he *is* large, Bertie; no one can deny that; and if Mrs. Prowse makes a fuss about him now, what will she say when the wet weather comes, and he gets his feet muddy!"

"I shouldn't care what she said; tell her, if she doesn't like to sit in your rooms, that she can keep in her own. You think too much of that woman, Nelly—you seem to forget that you are the mistress of Monkton's house, and not her."

Nelly could have answered, "Yes, but he is the master," had she not been afraid of raising her brother's suspicions, so she turned it off, by saying that she should be the first to think it a shame if Thug were permitted to spoil such carpets as theirs with the marks of his great clumsy feet, and before winter set in, she should teach him to wipe them on the mat every time he entered the house. She did not meet her husband again until dinner-time, and then, although Bertie was as cheerful as usual, and she herself quite ready to appear to have forgotten that anything unpleasant had passed between them, she saw at a glance that Dr. Monkton had not yet succeeded in shaking off his ill-humour. Before

she had known her husband much longer, she was aware, that, if left to himself, he took days and sometimes even weeks to recover from such an attack.

She had been accustomed to witness very similar displays of temper from Bertie, for in the duration of their evil moods Robert Brooke and his brother-in-law were much alike.

But Nelly could better understand the feeling in one case than in the other, or her love for her brother made her fancy that she did so. She had always attributed Bertie's fits of sullenness to the depression of spirits induced by the discomfort and lack of excitement which surrounded his needy home.

But why a man, prosperous and happy, like Dr. Monkton, should find such difficulty in casting out the evil spirit, she could not comprehend; for that he was still angry with herself she would not believe. Her own nature was too forgiving to think so much wrong of another.

Yet, when she found that her remarks remained unanswered, that her smiles were unreturned, and that all her little arts to attract her husband's attention, or to excite his admiration, were unavailing, Nelly really became

nervous. She began to think that he must have heard something worse concerning her, —that Mrs. Prowse had been trying to make more mischief between them. She caught herself starting whenever the doctor condescended to open his mouth, lest it should be to blame her again ; yet she was still more alarmed when a slight difference of opinion arose between him and his brother-in-law. She was so eager, on that occasion, to interpose her own ideas on the subject under discussion, with the generous view of turning the argument against herself, that Bertie took her sharply to task for unwarrantable interference in what was no concern of hers.

She could not help fancying that there was a still greater alteration in her husband's manner towards her brother than towards herself, for in nothing that Bertie advanced did Dr. Monkton seem to agree ; and she was thankful when the meal was concluded to hear the former say that he intended to make the most of such an evening by going out again in his chair.

He rose and left the room, and they were alone. Her husband had also risen from table, and thrown himself upon the sofa.

Nelly had no pride—none of that odious

feeling at least which is too often quoted as a virtue, and which prompts an offended woman to act contrary to her own inclination in order that she may enjoy the paltry triumph of forcing the man to assume the position which should be hers, and be the first to sue for pardon.

She did not love her husband; if she had, such a state of things would never have arisen between them; but she was anxious to be friends with him, and she felt no shame in confessing it. So she followed him from the dinner-table, and knelt down by his side, and taking his unwilling hand in hers she looked full in his face with her sweet serious eyes, and said frankly:

"James! I am so sorry I offended Mrs. Filmer yesterday."

"It is not much use being sorry," he replied, as he resolutely turned away from her pleading face.

"Yes, it is," she answered cheerfully; "it is better than not caring at all, isn't it? Because, perhaps I can remedy it, James. You know that I was not rude on purpose; and if you will tell Mrs. Filmer that it was thoughtlessness, I daresay she will overlook it this

once, and I will promise you it shall not happen again."

He was a man after all; he could not resist such sweetness, nor rudely draw away the hand against which she had laid her cheek.

"I am very young, you see," continued Nelly, "and what your sister says is true—I am very ignorant of the ways of society. We had no grand parties nor fashionable ladies at Little Bickton, and I daresay that what would seem natural to me in the country would appear rude to people in a town. So if you will only take the trouble to tell me what to do, James, I will do it with all my heart."

He could not be generous enough to tell her all he thought of her compliance; but he stooped and kissed her broad forehead, and Nelly accepted the silent caress as a token of his forgiveness.

"Since you wish me to direct your actions, Helena," he commenced, with some pomposity, "(and it is certainly my place to do so), there are several things my sister mentioned, in which you appear to her to have shown a want of judgment."

At this allusion to his adviser, Nelly winced.

"Can't you decide for me, James, without consulting Mrs. Prowse?" she asked hastily.

He looked at her with astonishment.

"And what is your objection to Matilda, Helena? She is only too anxious to see you on good terms with Mrs. Filmer, and all the other ladies of Hilstone, and conducting this establishment in the same style in which she did it herself. She has nothing so much at heart as my popularity, in which of course your own is concerned. You could not have a better counsellor with regard to the behaviour calculated to render you a favourite in Hilstone."

"Oh! very well, then. Go on!" said the girl, impatiently. She did not dare disturb their newborn peace by remarking that the last thing she cared about was to become the pet of Hilstone.

"Matilda considers that it was ill-advised of you to refuse to join the choral society, of which all the principal ladies here are members, including Miss Filmer herself, and as my wife you are of course bound to encourage everything which advances the interests of the town."

"I told Miss Filmer I would subscribe to it," cried Nelly.

"But I should wish you to become a member, Helena."

"It will take up so much time," she argued. "Your sister says they meet for private, as well as public practice."

"If it monopolised twice as much it would be time well spent," replied her husband; "you have not much to keep you at home, Helena."

Nelly thought of two or three evenings each week spent away from Bertie, and made a final struggle for liberty.

"But, James, I promised Dr. Nesbitt that I would not join it."

"Ah! that is another thing that I must mention to you," he said quickly. "I hear that you spoke far too freely of Dr. Nesbitt and Mr. Rumbell, before Mrs. Filmer. Those gentlemen are both, as it were, in the retinue of the dean, and his daughter-in-law does not like to hear that any such are more intimate at other houses than they are at the Deanery. If they come here often, or mix with us on more than friendly terms, (such as in the case of Dr. Nesbitt giving you singing lessons), you must learn not to speak of it, or you will cause jealousy amongst your neighbours, and perhaps do harm to your friends them-

selves, by exciting Mrs. Filmer's anger against them."

This was presenting an entirely new phase of social life for the contemplation of his unsophisticated listener, and when Nelly opened her eyes wide at the receipt of her husband's communication, it was with unaffected surprise.

"Are you really in earnest, James?" she said, "or are you laughing at me? What possible concern can it be of Mrs. Filmer's, if Dr. Nesbitt comes oftener to this house than he does to the Deanery? Why! he doesn't belong to her, does he?"

At this ingenuous question, Dr. Monkton so far forgot his ill-humour as to laugh.

"She would like him to do so, my dear, body and soul, and those who desire to remain in her good graces, had best pretend to think that he does. And, since, as regards ourselves, a great deal depends upon her not being offended with us, you will see the necessity of regulating your behaviour towards her and everyone connected with the Deanery, not so much by what *you* think correct, as by what you see that *she* does."

For a few minutes Nelly remained silent, then she gave a deep sigh.

"What is the matter now?" said her husband, not unkindly.

"It will be so dreadfully difficult," she replied. "I am afraid I shall never be able to do it properly."

"To do what?" he enquired. "If you allude to the Choral Society, Helena, so long as you attend the practices, it little matters if you sing or not."

"Oh! no, not that," she said, shaking her head, "I meant with regard to Mrs. Filmer, James. You know I am so foolish; I have been accustomed to say just what I think, to laugh when I feel inclined, and to remain silent when I don't wish to talk; that I am afraid I shall always be making mistakes. If a thing is not wrong or unkind, it seems so natural to me to say it, and as for keeping a secret, or pretending what I do not feel, I never could do it, and I never shall."

But to this strain of frivolity Dr. Monkton saw fit to put a summary conclusion.

"You *must* help such things, Helena, and you must do them, into the bargain, when the contrary mode of action will affect our welfare. And if I find that your own sense is not sufficient to point out to you the advisability of altering your behaviour in these respects, I

shall be compelled, for my own sake, to remove all such obstacles from your path, as might tempt you to act otherwise."

At these words Nelly suddenly left her kneeling position beside her husband, and walked towards the window. She could not pretend to misunderstand his threat, nor to be blind to the implied truth that if she did not submit of herself, he would rule her through her love for Bertie. Nothing that he had ever done or said before had sunk him, like this, in her opinion. She despised him for the means he had so unnecessarily adopted to control her, although she dared not but submit to his guidance.

"Only tell me what you wish me to do, James!" she replied, in an altered voice from the window, "and I have said before that I am ready to do it. I daresay even telling stories will come easy to me after a time, for there is no saying what we can do till we try."

Dr. Monkton did not consider this tone of jesting to be any change for the better, for he was a man who could never take a joke when directed against himself.

"I see nothing whatever to laugh at," he said, "in my desire that you should learn to behave like other people. A minute ago,

Helena, I thought you were in earnest in wishing to please me; now I suppose I may conclude that you have no intention to try!"

One thought of Bertie, and her spirit of sarcasm fled before it.

"No! indeed, James! pray don't say that. I have every wish and every intention. I will call on Mrs. Filmer whenever you think proper; and you shall go with me to see how well I can behave, and I will try—indeed I will—to make the people in Hilstone like me as much as possible."

She held out her hand, and he drew her towards him, and ratified a fresh forgiveness. But this caress was still less palatable to Nelly than the last. Let a man once utter a word, or perform an action, which shall make a woman really *despise* him; which shall cause her to rank him lower in the scale of creation than herself, and compassion may remain, but love is gone for ever. In this case there was no love to take its flight; but the hope of its arising even had been quenched by Dr. Monkton's threat.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE AMATEUR CHORAL SOCIETY OF HILSTONE.

NELLY was as good as her word. She not only strove to conciliate Mrs. Prowse by asking her advice with respect to the time, manner, and style in which she should return Mrs. Filmer's call, but actually requested her sister-in-law to accompany her to the Deanery, and promised to put on her best dress and bonnet for the occasion.

Dr. Monkton had been careful to secure the ear of his patroness before his young wife crossed her threshold, during which interview he begged her to ascribe Nelly's apparent neglect to her ignorance of the laws of etiquette, and as the handsome persuasive doctor was a great favourite with the Dean's daughter-in-law, his petition was granted, and Mrs. Filmer expressed herself graciously prepared to overlook Mrs. Monkton's first offence.

And when this favourable opening was followed by a state visit from Nelly and Mrs.

Prowse, during which the bride sat bolt upright on the Deanery sofa, looking as shy and saying as little as even the heart of the canon's wife could desire, the promise of pardon was confirmed, and a bond of peace, if not of cordiality, was tacitly signed between them.

Miss Laura Filmer, who, without so much dignity to maintain, had never regarded the conduct of Mrs. Monkton in the same light as her mother, appeared charmed with her new acquaintance, and readily extracted the promise, which poor Nelly had bound herself to give, that she would at once become a member of the Hilstone Choral Society. Captain Herbert Filmer also, who was at the Deanery at the time, was vastly taken with the sweet blushing face of their visitor, and lauded it so much, both in town and barracks, that the sycophantic herd by which he and his sister were surrounded, could but commence to sing to the same strain, and under such patronage Nelly was soon in danger of becoming what she had so little wished to be—a Hilstone favourite.

Her successful visit to the deanery was shortly followed by an invitation to dinner there, which in due time her husband informed her they must return. This was an event

which Nelly had greatly dreaded; but when it came to pass, she was surprised to find how little it affected her. Dr. Monkton had excellent taste, and he took care that all trouble concerning the entertainment should be taken off his wife's hands. She had nothing to do but to adorn herself, and receive her guests; and when eventually she took her seat at the head of the table, and surveyed the exquisite manner in which everything was arranged, it seemed to her ignorance as though the feast had sprung up by magic for her convenience. She was rather quiet during the whole evening, for she felt the importance of the position to which she was so unaccustomed; but she comported herself with much grace, and the general opinion, led by the outspoken compliments of Laura and Herbert Filmer, was, that Dr. Monkton's bride was a "very sweet young creature." Mrs. Filmer, who could not quite forget her first reception at No. 15, was not so ready to subscribe to the last sentiment, but as she nodded her august head when some one ventured to repeat it to her, and said "very well in her way, but wants manner; if Matilda Prowse will take her in hand, I daresay she'll do," it was generally believed that she did not disapprove of the doctor's choice, and

the verdict was pronounced in Hilstone accordingly.

Whilst all this gaiety was going on downstairs, Robert Brooke remained in his own room. He had said that he should do so; and dearly as Nelly loved him, and little as she enjoyed any pleasure without him, she felt that his decision was best, particularly as her husband had said upon hearing it that he should have thought it very strange, if he had had any other intention.

She had visited her brother, however, more than once during the evening, and he had admired her blue dress and the forget-me-nots she wore in her hair, as much as she could possibly desire. But after each brief interview she seemed to return to her guests with less cheerfulness. Bertie had said that he should never feel his exclusion from such scenes; that he had not the slightest wish to mix in them: yet on this first occasion of his being left alone, he did seem to feel it.

She even thought by the dulness of his eyes and the brevity of his answers, that some of his old sullen spirit was getting the mastery over him again. For since Nelly had promised her husband that she would do all in her power to make the people of Hilstone like her, her

greatest trouble had been through her brother, for whom alone she had conceded to what was so much against her inclination.

It had been very hard to hear Bertie's sarcasms on her rapid change of opinion: to hear him laugh at her meek surrender of her rights: at her forbearance with Mrs. Prowse; her deference to Mrs. Filmer, and not to tell him for whose sake she so humbled herself. He had sneered at her for want of spirit; had prophesied that she would never be fit to take her place in society, and averred that if the management of her house and herself was to be thus put into alien hands, they had better have remained at Little Bickton, where at least they were masters of their own.

He had done worse than this; for, convinced that it was the fault of Mrs. Prowse that his sister was not left more at liberty, he had tried to resent the fancied tyranny by seizing every possible opportunity to annoy the canon's wife, which ill-advised proceeding had provoked a feeling of enmity between them which increased each time they met.

It was in vain that Nelly, dreading the consequence of such a feud, entreated him to be more forbearing with her sister-in-law; he

was determined as he said, that Mrs. Prowse should see that one of the family, at least, had a little spirit, and finding that the more she remonstrated, the more mischievous he became, she directed her whole attention to preventing any needless encounter taking place between the belligerents.

The printed ticket, by the purchase of which she was enrolled a member of the Amateur Choral Society of Hilstone, was duly sent to her, and Nelly prepared to accompany her sister-in-law to the place of practice on the first Wednesday evening after its reception.

It was a wet, unpleasant night, for September had now arrived, and the month had set in with rain.

"I think we had almost better have stayed at home this week," remarked Nelly laughing, as she picked her way along the streaming flagstones.

"What! missed *the practice* for a little rain?" returned Mrs. Prowse, "I hope you will not ever think of doing such a thing, Mrs. James. Nothing short of illness should be suffered to keep you away."

"But a damp air like this must be very bad for the voice," said Nelly, "not that I care about mine, for I know I shall not be able

to sing a note. I cannot read music at first sight."

"Then our meetings will be of the greatest advantage to you," replied Mrs. Prowse, "for it was for the purpose of teaching the members to read concerted music fluently, that the society was instituted. I don't think it will rain again before we reach the Institute, and should it do so on our coming out, I have ordered Crummy's Double to fetch us home."

"What!" exclaimed Nelly in amazement.

"*Crummy's Double*," repeated the canon's wife with the utmost gravity, "it is a most convenient little conveyance, peculiar to Hilstone; however, you will doubtless see it as we return to-night."

At this juncture they reached the door of the Mechanics' Institute, and Nelly had no further opportunity for enquiring why the "convenient little conveyance" bore such an extraordinary name, for in another minute they had entered the lobby, which was also the ladies' retiring-room, and were being elbowed and hustled about amidst a crowd of female members, who each with a roll of music beneath her arm was trying to secure a safe corner in which to deposit her bundle of wraps and umbrellas.

Nelly's first idea was that they were all dressmakers; the next, they were all old women. When she had leisure, however, to discriminate amidst the motley group, she perceived that there were a few gentlewomen amongst it, and perhaps a dozen under twenty years of age; otherwise she found no reason to alter her original opinion. The lobby was a mass of dust and confusion, and filled with an endless war of tongues. Here was Mrs. Roe with spectacles perched across her Roman nose; and Miss Hammond, the curls of whose grey wig kept up a constant bobbing with her recognitions; and Miss Laura Filmer, for whom the whole society obsequiously made way; and the Misses Harley, who followed and toadied her wherever she went. Nelly, who had laid aside her walking things as soon as she entered the room, was staring about her in utter amazement, to think that women could talk so much about so little when she was perceived by Miss Filmer, and immediately taken possession of.

"Ah! Mrs. Monkton—so here you are! Take my arm—do—and let us get out of this mob."

The words were not uttered very politely, but the "mob" smiled and fell back, leaving

a narrow passage through which Nelly felt herself dragged into the outer hall again.

"The worst of a society of this kind," said Miss Filmer, quite audibly, as they ascended the staircase together, "is that it is impossible to exclude the tradespeople. It is a local institution you see—the only requisite for admission to which is a good voice, and we should offend half the town by being particular. Even if it were possible to be so in a place like this, when half the so-called gentry are retired tradesmen. Now, the Harleys, for instance——Oh! here they are," continued the young lady without the least discomposure, as she was overtaken by the subjects of her remark. "Well! Miss Harley, I suppose you won't try the solos again to-night, as I understand Mrs. Clarence is to be here."

"I don't know, I'm sure," replied the Miss Harley she addressed, who was pinched and elderly, and had a decidedly red nose. "Mrs. Clarence is here, I believe, and I know she has a very loud voice—*coarse* I should call it; but whether she understands music remains to be proved."

"She is a pupil of Garcia's anyhow," replied Miss Filmer, who seemed to hate the Hilstonians as much as her mother adored

them, and had a decided taste for anything military, although she was not permitted to indulge it by associating with the officers' wives.

"Do you not take some of the solos yourself?" inquired Nelly, thinking that, as one of the most important members of the society, Miss Filmer would be entitled to choose in such matters.

"Oh, dear no! I am a very insignificant personage as far as the singing is concerned," laughed her companion, "I have scarcely any voice, and should not come here at all if it were not for the fun of the thing. I'm only a second—what are you?"

"Contralto—I believe," said Nelly, guessing she alluded to the quality of her voice; "at least Dr. Nesbitt says so."

"I'm glad of that—then we will sit together and amuse ourselves by quizzing the old women. It will kill you to hear Mrs. Roe sing, and Mrs. Prowse. Oh! I forgot though—she's a relation of yours, isn't she? I'm sure I beg your pardon; but she *will* try the solos, and does make such a dreadful hash of them. I hope Mr. Rumbell will offer them to Mrs. Clarence. It will drive all the others mad."

The room in which the meeting was held—except for a few benches placed at one end for the accommodation of the singers—was bare of furniture. Round the space left vacant were ranged the members of the orchestra, and in the midst of them, batôn in hand, was standing the fat canon Mr. Rumbell, bowing and smiling to each lady as she entered.

When Miss Filmer appeared with Nelly by her side, he left his position and advanced into the centre of the room to shake hands with them and politely express his pleasure at the latter having joined his staff.

"I expect we shall have a treat to-night, Miss Filmer, a regular treat—Mrs. Clarence is here; and I am thinking of offering her the solos. What do you say?"

"Offer them, by all means, Mr. Rumbell, and make her take them. It will be delicious! Have you a book to lend Mrs. Monkton?"

He produced a copy of Haydn's Seasons—armed with which Nelly followed her new friend to the seats appointed for them. Mrs. Prowse, who flattered herself that her shrill pipe was a soprano, was already ensconced upon the other side of the room; but she bustled across it before the practice commenced, in order to air her intimacy with the

dean's granddaughter before the less fortunate members of the society.

"My dear Laura," she said, in a tone which was at all events audible to all who were near, "do you see how unfortunately I am placed, close by the side of *that* Mrs. Clarence ?—actually next to her—so very awkward. And she is looking as composed the while as if she had attended here every night of her life. What assurance, is it not ? Ah ! Mrs. Roe, I see you are listening to what I say. You and I agree upon this point, I know. But did you ever see such coolness ? I really believe she thinks Mr. Rumbell will offer her the solos. He ! he ! he !"

"She can hardly expect that, I should say," remarked Miss Filmer, with the most deceptive gravity ; "not at least while *you* are in the room, Mrs. Prowse ; and if I were you I wouldn't allow her to accept them if he did."

"Oh ! but he *won't*, my dear," was the unaffected reply ; "he *couldn't*—it would never be allowed ; but I must run back again. The naughty man is getting impatient—he will break his batôn if he raps us to order in that fashion. Good-bye." And the canon's wife skipped playfully back to her seat on the

other side of the room. As she quitted them Nelly glanced towards the spot where the much-abused Mrs. Clarence was quietly sitting, but could only discern the profile of a fresh frank face, the owner of which appeared to be attentively studying the music she held in her hand. She was wondering why such an inoffensive-looking woman should be the cause of so much spite, when her attention was redirected to the proceedings of the evening by the president (after having made a short speech expressive of his satisfaction at welcoming two new and valuable additions to the society) giving out that the practice for that night was to consist of the first book of Haydn's Seasons.

Following this announcement there came an universal buzz, during which Nelly easily perceived that instead of reading their parts at first sight, most of the members had been studying them beforehand.

"We miss the third page, dear."

"No, not if there is anyone to take the recitative."

"Mind you give us that first B well."

"Yes, and don't forget that the time changes after the opening movement." All this and much more being said as fast as pos-

sible, and at the same moment, whilst the speakers' heads were nodding significantly at one another.

"Ladies! ladies!" at last exclaimed the president in despair, finding that rapping with his baton to attract their attention only served to increase the din, "it is impossible that any business can be done whilst you refuse to give me a hearing."

"Now he's getting angry, the naughty fellow," tittered Miss Harley.

"We shall really have to scold you," said the youthful Sophy Hammond in an undertone, as she shook her finger at the supposed delinquent.

"I wish to goodness you'd hold your tongues," said Miss Filmer abruptly, turning to her loquacious neighbours. "One would think you were a pack of children behind there."

This reproof had the desired effect; the giddy creatures' voices sunk into whispers. Order was restored, and the baited president, who had actually left his daïs and walked twice across the room in his irritation, returned to his place again.

"I was going to observe," he recommenced, "that it is very desirable we should

get up Haydn's Seasons for our next concert, but there is a difficulty about the solos, which are by no means easy."

"We can have a professional to take them, when the time comes," snapped Mrs. Prowse.

"Very true!" replied Mr. Rumbell, "but they are so intermixed with the choruses that it is impossible to practise one without the other."

"We had better not attempt it then," said Mrs. Roe.

"Happily for the society," continued the president smiling, "I have been fortunate enough to find a way out of the dilemma. This lady," waving his hand towards Mrs. Clarence, "is kind enough to say that she will sing the solos for us, and I am certain that she will do them every justice."

At this undisguised announcement of their president's base intentions, Mrs. Clarence smiled and bowed; whilst the other members of the Choral Society glanced at her and one another, speechless with vexation.

"I thought, I thought, Mr. Rumbell," panted Mrs. Prowse, "that to avoid invidious comparisons, it was a rule of the society, that no resident in Hilstone should be allowed to take a solo."



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"Mrs. Clarence is not a resident," replied the canon, waiving the objection. "We consider the regimental ladies as only temporary visitors, more 's the pity! But we are wasting time, and will proceed at once, if you please." And at a wave of his hand, the orchestra struck up the opening symphony.

There was nothing then for the ladies to do, but to swallow their indignation as best they might, or reserve it for a more convenient opportunity.

To Nelly, to whom Haydn's Seasons was as a volume of Greek, and who had consequently nothing to do but to watch the proceedings of those around her, all this was as good as a play. She was so infinitely amused at what she saw and heard; she laughed so immoderately and so long, and Laura Filmer took such delight in making her laugh more, by her whispering observations, that at last she grew seriously afraid that her merriment would be noticed by Mrs. Prowse, and that she should get into fresh trouble with her husband.

"Pray don't, Miss Filmer," she repeatedly entreated, "pray don't set me off again, for my sister-in-law is watching us, and she will be so angry."

"And won't they let you laugh, poor child?" said Miss Filmer compassionately.

"Oh! yes, indeed!" was Nelly's quick reply, "but not here you know; not in so public a place. It is not proper; and I might give offence to several people."

"Well, you can do as you like," said Miss Filmer, "but you can't object to my pointing out a few objects of curiosity to your notice," and in consequence, the 'objects of curiosity' continued to defeat all poor Nelly's efforts to behave as became the wife of Dr. Monkton, and the sister-in-law of Mrs. Prowse. The symphony was over and the singers rose for the opening chorus. It was scrambled through in a very tame manner, and should have been followed by a tenor solo, taken by Mr. Rumbell's fellow canon, Mr. Pratt, but which on the score of unproficiency, that gentleman begged to be excused until the succeeding week. It was now Mrs. Clarence's turn for display; and amid a battery of ill-natured glances she rose to read a very difficult recitative.

She accomplished the first few lines very well, considering the many obstacles they presented to an amateur; and her clear,

powerful voice, fully equal to the occasion, rang through the empty room.

But after a while, she slightly hesitated, and then with a quick glance at the leader, gave forth a wrong note. It was both in tune and time, but it was not the note written down by Haydn. Mrs. Clarence being a real musician perceived her error at once, which few of her fellow students did, and stopped with an apology. The president was about to say it was of no consequence, and desire the orchestra to re-strike the chord, when a titter ran audibly through the room: a piece of discourtesy intended to confuse the singer, which had been put in motion by Mrs. Prowse, and eagerly seconded by all who were envious of the new member.

Mrs. Clarence, unaccustomed to being laughed at, looked round, colouring deeply.

Laura Filmer asked aloud, "Who was that?" and even Nelly in her surprise could not help exclaiming :—

"How very rude!"

The tittering ceased, but most of the ladies continued to smile furtively behind their music-books, and Mr. Rumbell was just going to apologise for such a lapse of good breeding,

on the part of his pupils, when Mrs. Clarence's voice was heard distinctly to ask :—

"Did I not understand you to say, Mr. Rumbell, that this society was expressly for the practice of reading music at first sight, and that the members were bound not to learn their parts at home? Else I would have looked over these solos before I came here, and not have ventured to expose myself, as it seems to me, by the merriment of these ladies, I must have done."

Before the president could answer, and assure her she was right in her conjecture, Miss Filmer said across the room :—

"Yes, Mrs. Clarence, you are perfectly correct in thinking so, albeit there is scarcely a member who does not study the choruses in private, before attempting to sing them here. Perhaps, however, considering what a jumble we make of them, it is just as well that it is so. But there is no one who is competent to do what you have done to-night, and we ought all to be greatly obliged to you for accepting the thankless office."

Such a speech from the dean's granddaughter to a perfect stranger could not fail to stem, if not to turn, the tide of public opinion. Mrs. Prowse bit her lip, and looked sadly

conscious, as did several of her colleagues, whilst Mrs. Clarence, reassured by the timely compliment which was echoed by the president, proceeded with her recitative and finished triumphantly.

Nelly admired Miss Filmer for the boldness with which she had spoken—she saw that her sarcasm was only elicited for the benefit of such as deserved it, and from that evening she took a great fancy for the seemingly discourteous girl.

The practice concluded without further disturbance, and as soon as it was broken up, a crowd of agitated females, Mrs. Prowse amongst the number, surrounded Mr. Rumbell's dais, threatening to overwhelm him, with their questions, arguments, and disputes.

"Just look at them!" exclaimed Miss Filmer, aloud, pointing out the excited group to Nelly's notice; "they'll kill that poor man some night, between them. I often wonder to meet him, walking about alive and unharmed on Thursday mornings. But come, Mrs. Monkton, let us leave them to consume him by themselves."

"It would take a long time to do that," laughed Nelly, as she followed her down the stairs. "There is plenty of him, I am sure."

"Yes, I know you think so," responded her new friend, "and mamma has not forgotten that you called him a white—fat—man. He is an especial pet of hers, and the terms offended her greatly."

"But it is true," remonstrated Nelly, "he is white and fat."

"Perfectly true, Mrs. Monkton; I am not the one to dispute it, only the truth must not always be spoken, and especially in Hilstone—as you will find out for yourself before long. But it is pouring with rain: is your carriage coming for you?" and on being answered in the negative, Miss Filmer continued, "Let me take you home, then—it is all in the way." But, just then, Nelly remembered "Crummy's double," and declined the offered civility.

"No, thank you, Miss Filmer! I believe I had better not. I must wait for my sister-in-law, and she said, that, in case of rain, she had engaged Crummy's—Crummy's—something or other, to come for us."

"Oh! 'Crummy's double,'" said Laura Filmer, with a laugh, "then there's a treat in store for you, and for me, too, for I shall wait to see you get in, and hear how you like it. Where is Mrs. Prowse? Miss Hill, will you

please run up-stairs, and tell Mrs. Prowse that Mrs. Monkton and Crummy's double are alike waiting for her."

In another minute the canon's wife had joined them, and the ladies, having procured their wraps, proceeded to the door together.

"Now, pray don't stand in the draught, my dear Laura," pleaded Mrs. Prowse, "your carriage will be up, directly, and your dear mamma will be so vexed if you take a cold."

"It's not my carriage I want, but yours," replied Miss Filmer; "I am anxious to witness the success of Mrs. Monkton's first attempt to enter 'Crummy's double.'"

"I am sure there is nothing to see!" said the canon's wife, in a tone of dissatisfaction.

"That is my concern," replied Miss Filmer; "I have the happy facility of taking pleasure in small things."

At the door of the Institute stood a tall, narrow conveyance, more like a double sedan chair, on wheels, than anything else, and which was drawn by a couple of donkeys. Nelly was just going to exclaim at the singularity of its appearance, when Laura Filmer continued, in a gleeful voice—

"Here it is! here's 'Crummy's double;'

now ring the bell, and draw up the curtain, for the play is just going to begin."

A lad came forward and opened the door of the vehicle, into which Mrs. Prowse, too offended even to bid Miss Filmer good-night, stepped in silent dignity.

Nelly, after the exchange of a laughing farewell, essayed to follow her sister-in-law, but stood balancing herself on the step instead.

"Where am I to sit?" she asked, with surprise, for the interior seemed filled even with the sparse figure of Mrs. Prowse.

"Ah! where indeed?" echoed Miss Filmer, from the doorstep; "this is just what I came to ascertain, for I feel quite curious on the subject."

"I wish to goodness you would enter the 'double,' Mrs. James," said Mrs. Prowse, testily, "and not stand there, making us the laughing-stocks of the whole society. There is plenty of room here for two; and always has been."

Thus adjured, Nelly made a bold plunge into the carriage, and alighting on the back seat, felt as though she were sitting in an infant's high chair, whilst her knees grated against those of her sister-in-law, and her head

just cleared the roof above it. Mrs. Prowse next gave the order to start; and "Crummy's double," lurching violently to one side, and then to the other, set off, shaking and jolting over the stony street, followed by a most irreverent peal of laughter from the grand-daughter of the dean.

"I cannot imagine what has come to Laura Filmer, to-night," said Mrs. Prowse, as soon as the rattling of the donkey-chair would permit her remarks to be heard; "she is not at all like herself—but indeed the practice altogether has been a most unsatisfactory one. How did you get on, Mrs. James?"

"Not very well; but it is all new to me, you know. I had enough to do to look about me."

"I observed that you laughed a great deal," said her sister-in-law.

"I really could not help it!" replied Nelly, apologetically.

"I saw nothing to laugh at, myself," was the unsympathetic response.

And indeed poor Nelly had gone down several degrees in the estimation of the canon's wife, for her levity during the evening.

Mrs. Prowse was almost ready to return to her first opinion that she was both "forward

and presuming," almost sorry for what she had said to Dr. Monkton, concerning her, only the day before, namely, "that if Mrs. James could be but separated from that very unpleasant and exacting young man, her brother, whose influence over her was all for harm; and given over to the guidance of herself and dear Mrs. Filmer, she really thought that, with patience, they might in time make something of her."

## CHAPTER IV.

BERTIE SHEWS THE EXTENT OF HIS GRATITUDE.

"WHERE are you going, Nelly?" said Bertie, fretfully, one afternoon, a few weeks afterwards, as his sister, attired in her walking things, thrust her head into his room, to nod him a cheerful farewell.

Touched by the sound of his voice, Nelly crossed the threshold to bend over his sofa.

"Only to give Thug half an hour's run in the meadows, darling!" she said, affectionately. "But do you want me?"

"No, not at this moment," he answered, in the same discontented tone, "but you won't be long, will you? and you'll stay with me, this evening?"

Nelly's face fell.

"I *can't*, this evening, Bertie! It's Wednesday, remember; the night of the choral practice."

"You are not obliged to attend it."

"Not exactly *obliged*, perhaps; but if I do

not, Mrs. Prowse makes an unnecessary fuss about it, and speaks to James, and then he is angry with me ; I had a lecture, last week, because I remained at home with you."

"What a wretch that woman is !" exclaimed Bertie, angrily, "she is always interfering between us, now. I declare not a day passes but there is something unpleasant. But I'll pay her out for it, as sure as my name's Brooke."

He was for ever making impotent threats of the kind, which only resolved themselves into his being impertinent to the canon's wife, and her complaining to her brother on the subject, until Nelly had begun to dread a collision between them.

"You must not speak like that, dear Bertie," she said, on the present occasion. "You aggravate Mrs. Prowse to such an extent already, that you have to thank yourself for half the annoyance she causes you. Why, the reason I want now to give Thug a run is, that the poor brute has been shut up for half the day on your account."

"And by whose orders ?"

"By those of James ; but he gave them in consequence of his sister telling him that you had urged the dog to put his dirty feet upon

her lap yesterday. You know she hates the animal, and has not much love for you, and yet you cannot leave us in peace when we are so."

"That's right, take their parts!" exclaimed Bertie, "I believe you like them both a great deal better than you do me. You are altogether changed since you came to Hilstone, Nelly. You used never to think it any trouble to sit by me for a few hours when I was sick or sorry at Little Bickton, but now your head is so full of your choral practices and your dinner parties, and your fine new acquaintances, that I suppose you would consider it a loss of time to look after an useless cripple like myself."

The utter injustice of this accusation did not lessen its power to sting poor Nelly. That Bertie, her brother, for whom she had done all this, for whom she daily endured the uncongenial society of Mrs. Prowse, and meekly submitted to her husband's wishes; that *he* should think she was enjoying herself without him, and preferring scenes of pleasures, to lightening the burthen of his weary hours, was too much. She had not cried violently for a long time; she was too much afraid of the remarks which the traces of her emotion

might provoke ; but in the present instance, Bertie's unkind words broke down all her self-control, and she threw herself sobbing beside his couch.

It was so hard—so very, very hard—that *he* should be the one to censure her !

" Oh ! Bertie—darling—Bertie, my dearest brother—you know—you must know it is not the case. I would like to be with you always, dear, I have more pleasure in sitting by your sofa, than mixing in any company ; but how can I help it ? James says, that as his wife, it is absolutely necessary that I should visit and be friendly with the people of Hilstone ; he insists upon my accepting the invitations which we receive, and giving parties in return, and I have no choice. If I were to refuse to go out, or receive his friends here, on the plea that I did not like to leave you alone, he might say——"

" What *could* he say ?" demanded Bertie, who was not yet convinced but that his sister might do as she chose.

Nelly remembered herself in time.

" He might think it was a frivolous excuse, darling, and say that I owe as much attention to him as to you."

"At all events, you might try the experiment," persisted her brother.

"I have tried," she answered, in a low voice.

"And with what success?"

"James said I must do as he bid me."

She dared not tell him further.

"But now, Bertie, since I cannot stay with you to-night," she continued, trying to speak more cheerfully, "cannot we think of some amusement for you in my absence? What will you do with yourself?"

"There is nothing to be done in this beastly place," he said despondingly.

Nelly started. Hilstone a "beastly place," merely to live at which appeared, at one time, to be the summit of his desire. She almost thought that she must have been mistaken in his words.

"Nothing to be done here," she echoed. "Why, Bertie dear, what is it that you want? You have everything you need to make you comfortable at home, and every convenience for going about. What more could you have anywhere?"

"What's the use of having a thing to go about in," he answered rudely, "when there's no where to go to?"

"No where to go to?" repeated Nelly.

"Yes, no where to go to. I wish you wouldn't keep repeating my words like a parrot, Nell. I made sure, of course, that a large town like Hilstone would possess a theatre and music hall, and have something going on occasionally which should amuse a man; but I declare the place is perfectly stagnant. There 's not a young fellow to be seen in it, out of the barracks, nor a respectable billiard-table either. It's sickening."

"But, Bertie," said Nelly, to whom this plaint for music halls and billiard-tables was something entirely new. "You never had any of these things at Little Bickton."

But this crowning proof of his sister's want of sense, irritated Robert Brooke beyond bearing.

"At *Little Bickton*," he said, sneeringly, "of course I didn't have them at Little Bickton, and you may remember how happy I was there into the bargain. Why, what on earth do you imagine I wanted to leave the place for, if it were not to procure those pleasures with which it was unprovided? And now, this hole is nearly as bad as the other, in fact, I'm not sure that it isn't worse. In the country, I could at all events, have *you* to sit with me whenever I felt lonely; but here, you are away

three nights in the week, and Monkton is always with you the other three. It's wretched work for me; and if I go out, it's not much better. I used to say there was nothing to be seen at Little Bickton but grass and cabbages, but here there's nothing to be seen but hedges and dust; unless I go through the town, which never varies either, and jolts me to death. And as for all your old women acquaintances, who come jabbering round my chair, I hate them like poison, and would go five miles the other way to avoid meeting them."

Nelly rose from her position with a sigh. What could she say which should make a spirit like this contented? And she had hoped, ah! how she had hoped, that this change of life would bring her brother all the happiness he coveted.

"I will stay with you, dear," she said gently, laying aside her gloves and parasol. "This next hour, at all events, is my own."

"But I don't want you," he replied gloomily, "I would much rather be alone, and you have made your eyes so red, that you had better go out and get rid of them, or your dear sister-in-law will demand the reason of your tears. And then, when she hears it is my fault, there will be another row."

So Nelly gathered up her things again, and kissing Bertie as warmly as though his words to her had been all affection, called her mastiff and took her way to the meadows.

The animal was at first exuberant in his delight at being once more free; he had sadly felt being shut up in disgrace in a small room on the kitchen floor, and his mistress had felt it almost as much as himself; but now she seemed to have no heart to rejoice with him on his liberty. His pleasure was chiefly shewn in tearing about a quarter of a mile in advance, and returning as swiftly, with his nose to the ground, until he reached Nelly's side, when he would give a bark of joy, and a bound which nearly sent her on her back. It was in vain she cautioned him not to upset her; Thug's gratitude and ecstasy were too great; and it was not until the intelligent brute had leisure to perceive there was something wrong with his young mistress, that he could be persuaded to walk as steadily as usual. When he did observe that she greeted his gambols without a smile, he needed no further warning to be sober.

Which amongst us does not know what it is to have a dog sympathise with our trouble?

Poor Nelly's tears had too much cause to flow, and when she found herself traversing the quiet meadows where she could be secure from observation, they ran down with restraint. She could not but keenly feel the confession of her brother's disappointment.

If this was the case, if Bertie's lot was really no better for the change her marriage had effected in it, what was there further to hope, or look for? She could not marry over again; there was no chance of her being able to offer him the choice of another home! She had done what she had done of her own free will, certainly; but at his most earnest solicitation and desire, and now that things had not turned out as he had anticipated, there was no retreating, no going back to the dear old stupid life they had passed at Little Bickton, because the new life at Hilstone had been tried and proved a failure. Her brother was free, it was true (if so helpless and dependent a creature could ever be free of those who loved him), but she was tied—that was the galling thought—whatever happened to him, or between him and her husband, she had delivered herself over to another rule and jurisdiction, and must abide by the consequences. For Bertie's sake, to enliven his sad

existence, to prolong, as she had fondly hoped, his precious life, she had yielded up her freedom, and now that she was captive at his own request, he blamed her for not resisting the will of her lawful master.

But if she did resist, she knew what the consequence would be. She had observed for weeks past, ever since, indeed, the first conversation they had held upon the subject, that Dr. Monkton's manner towards Bertie was changing, that he not only appeared ready to quarrel with him, but anxious to find a pretext for doing so ; and more than once he had made her heart stand still by saying, with reference to some of her brother's words or actions, that he would not bear them much longer. Every fresh order he gave her, also, seemed issued with the intention of separating her as much as possible from Bertie, and forcing her to break through all the dear old customs which had been hers from infancy.

The doctor's hours for retiring to rest (like those of most men of his profession) were compelled to be very irregular, but he seldom left the house of an evening without reminding his wife to go to bed early ; for he admired her country roses too much not to desire their preservation.

Whenever Bertie came home in good time, Nelly had observed this request, but latterly he had been almost as irregular as his brother-in-law. Sometimes it had been eleven, or even twelve o'clock, before he returned to St. Bartholomew's Street, and his sister had seen him into his room, trembling the while lest her husband should come back before she could slip into her own. Her pale face and heavy eyes, however, one morning at the breakfast table, elicited such a string of searching enquiries from Dr. Monkton, that she found it impossible, without deception, to conceal the truth from him.

He did not blame her on that occasion, although he was angry at the cause of her appearance, but he strictly forbade her ever again to sit up for her brother.

"But it does me no harm, indeed, James," she had earnestly pleaded, "I have always been used to sit up for Bertie, and am none the worse for it."

"I am the best judge of that," he answered, decidedly, "at all events, my desire is that it does not occur again."

"But he *wants* me," she went on, with a view to gaining her point. "Bertie is not comfortable unless I read and say 'good-night'

to him, and see that he has all he requires."

"The old nurse can attend to that, I presume," replied her husband, "else, what is she here for? And whilst we are on the subject, let me tell you, Helena, that I do not approve of your attending your brother in his bed-room. It is not the usual custom, and it excites remark. My sister has already mentioned to me how very strange it appears in her eyes, and consequently will in those of others. Robert has all the help he needs, and if not, he can have more. Any way, there is no necessity for your being one of his servants, and therefore, whether he is home early or late, I desire that in future you allow him to find his way into his bed alone."

At this command, which appeared to her so needlessly unkind, Nelly at first felt angry. From her childhood, ever since they had ceased to occupy the same bed, she had been accustomed, in the true motherly fashion, to creep into her twin-brother's room the last thing at night to read the Bible, and see that he was comfortable, and whisper to him to be *sure* and not forget to say his prayers. And Bertie had always declared that he could not go to sleep unless Nelly's hand tucked in the bed-

clothes, and even at Little Bickton had kept her up until the most unreasonable hours in order that she might perform this last ceremony for him. At the thought that all this was to be omitted for the time to come, that the only moment in the day which she had for private converse with him must be given up; that from morning to night they would never now be sure of meeting without witnesses, Nelly even felt bold enough for remonstrance.

"Oh! I *can't* do that, James!" she had heedlessly exclaimed. "I must kiss Bertie the last thing at night, and tuck him up, or I shall not be able to sleep myself."

But the next moment she had repented her temerity. Her husband's brow grew suddenly dark, and his eyes looked like his sister's, as he said, not warmly, but with clenched teeth:

"*You can't?* but you *must*, Helena, and there's an end of the matter. Remember! you are no longer at Little Bickton. Your brother may have seen fit to make a slave of you while there, but I will not have your health and nerves destroyed, and your necessary rest curtailed by dancing attendance on him, here; and if you cannot manage to make him understand this of yourself, refer him to me, and he shall soon know my mind on the subject."

What could the girl do after this? She might have defied her husband to his face, as netted fishes flap against the meshes, but everyone knows how long that is likely to last, and that the more they flap the sooner they are exhausted; or she might, had she not been herself, have disobeyed him secretly, but that was not Nelly's nature, and in either case, detection and correction must have followed, and her correction would have been through Bertie. So that the poor little girl, in a very unheroine-like fashion, had betaken herself humbly to bed at ten o'clock every night since, to creep out of it again when she heard her brother's slow and shambling step upon the stairs, and stand with barefeet to watch him cautiously through an unclosed chink of the door, whilst she whispered, "Good-night, my darling, and God bless you!" before he disappeared. And in excuse for such unusual conduct on her part, she had only been able to tell him that her husband did not think it good for her to sit up later, and been doomed in return to hear herself called "selfish," and "lazy," and to be told that if she had not suggested the necessity of such a change, he was sure that Monkton never would have pressed it. For his sake she was submitting to everything that

she liked least, and Bertie could neither comprehend her devotion nor her fear. And now, added to it all, he was not even going to be happy himself.

As Nelly—walking alone through the quiet meadows—reflected on these things, she cried bitterly.

## CHAPTER V.

### NELLY AND NIGEL BROOKE MEET AGAIN.

THE meadows through which she rambled lay at the back of Hilstone, were three or four in number; had a trout stream running through them from end to end; and were connected with each other by ordinary turnstiles. They were a chosen resort of Nelly's, not only because their appearance transported her thoughts from the bricks and mortar of Hilstone back to the buttercups and daisies of her dear old home, but because her favourite Thug enjoyed nothing so much as scampering backwards and forwards along their broad expanse, or rolling his huge carcase over and over, like some donkey at play, amongst the thick rank grass with which the trout stream was fringed; and on the present occasion, although not quite so boisterous as usual, he was sufficiently content to make her entertain no thoughts of turning back until he had had his full allowance of holiday.

The meadows were quite empty, and Nelly mechanically passed through the first turnstile and the second without raising her eyes from the ground. The third led into a lane, after crossing which, a fourth field would take her almost back to her home. But as she was nearing this third stile, Thug first hung back with a low growl, and then with a sudden bound cleared the gate into the road beyond. Nelly thought nothing of the dog's action—he had scented another dog perhaps, or seen a plough-boy—it only roused her sufficiently to make her raise her hand to her eyes and dash away the tears which still hung upon their lashes. But as she passed through the turnstile, some one drew back to make way for her, and she looked up to see the last person on earth whom she expected—her cousin Nigel!

In a moment her face had crimsoned over, and her breathing become hurried, whilst he appeared equally moved by the surprise of their encounter.

But Nelly was a creature of impulse; her first feeling was joy at meeting him again, and she obeyed it, with an outstretched hand, and the genuine exclamation:

"Oh! Cousin Nigel! I am so glad to see you."

But before he had had time to return her friendly greeting, recollection came pouring back upon the poor child's heart; his quarrel with her brother and her husband flashed across her mind, and with a vague and sickly sense of having done something wrong, she turned away again towards the meadow, saying rapidly:

"But I had better go home—perhaps I had better go home."

"Have they forbidden you even to speak to me then, Nelly?"

It was his own kind voice, and she paused to listen to it and to consider. After all she had not been so forbidden. Bertie had often spoken to her in his bragging manner since their arrival in Hilstone, of what he should say and do, in the event of coming in contact with his cousin; but he had not seemed to calculate on her meeting with Nigel Brooke when alone. As for her husband, she had never heard him mention the name of the master of Orpington Chase, since they had been married. So she felt at least that she would be committing no actual disobedience by exchanging a few words with him, and after a moment's thought she said:

"Oh, no!—they have not indeed!" but so

faintly, that he had to stoop in order to catch her words.

"Is it your own inclination then which prompts you to avoid me, Nelly? Do you believe all that Robert says of me?"

She shook her head.

"Well! then you will surely not refuse to give me a few kind words. It is a long time since we met—nearly a twelvemonth. I suppose that you have almost forgotten me?"

"I shall never forget," she said sadly. "I was so happy at the Chase, and I have so regretted all that has passed between us since. How is Aunt Eliza, Cousin Nigel, and what—what does she think of me?"

In her anxiety for an answer to her question she for the first time raised her eyes to his, and enabled him to gain a full view of her face. He started backwards.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed; "what's the matter with you, Nelly. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Where?—how do you mean—in what manner?" she said, almost as surprised as her companion, and not in the least knowing to what he alluded.

"Your face—your eyes—your mouth!" he replied slowly, as he scanned her features.

"Oh! my dear girl — how you are altered!"

His meaning flashed upon her now, and remembering, if it were the case, whence the alteration came, the burthen of her care seemed suddenly to press upon her too heavily. The wonder expressed in her cousin's voice, the compassion of his gaze, no less than the affection with which he spoke, struck some chord in Nelly's overcharged heart, and she answered his question with a burst of tears.

"Oh! am I altered?" she said, as well as he could distinguish through her sobs. "Am I so altered in so short a time? I ought to be —I know I ought to be!" And she laid her head down on the wooden stile, and cried like a child.

When Nigel Brooke saw what effect his words had had, he grew quite nervous. Men generally are so when they have made a woman cry; they cannot understand that such a sudden and violent emotion may be not only harmless but a relief. He stood by alternately urging Nelly to be calm, and looking up and down the lane in dread lest some one should approach. But fortune favoured him, and when his cousin was once more composed, her tears had been without other wit-

ness than himself. And her whole anxiety then was to know what he could possibly have thought of her folly.

"Whatever can you think of me, Cousin Nigel, breaking down in this absurd manner," she said, trying to smile, "but somehow it has been all so sudden—and speaking of the Chase and Aunt Eliza—and you were very good to me, and to both of us—and——"

"Don't talk of it any more, Nelly," he answered in a voice scarcely less faltering than her own. "If you have felt the cause which separated us, I have felt it no less, God knows! And I knew all along that it was no fault of yours, and that you could not act otherwise than as your brother dictated to you. And now, all things are changed, you see, and there is no need for us to make ourselves miserable by raking up the past. I am glad to think that you are well married, and that in one respect at least you will never have reason to regret that Robert's decision was a hasty one. And now let me hear something about him and yourself! You are happy, of course! as you ought to be—and how is he? Is his back any stronger than it used to be?"

"No!—not the least, Cousin Nigel, nor ever will be, I am afraid!—and he has a

dreadful cough. Sometimes I lie awake half the night to hear him coughing, but he says he does it in his sleep, and scarcely remembers it in the morning. Dr. Monkton used to say —he used to think, I believe,—that there were several remedies that might benefit the weakness of his spine, but we have never tried them."

"But how is that?" asked Nigel, who had not failed to notice the formal name by which Nelly mentioned her husband.

"I scarcely know — but I suppose Dr. Monkton has altered his opinion about him. I spoke to him about it once, and he said it would be a sheer waste of time and money, and that Bertie will never be other than he is. But—oh! I do wish," with a deep-drawn sigh, "that he could cure his cough."

"Robert takes medicine for his cough, I presume."

"Yes!—at least he ought to do so—but he is very troublesome about his medicine. Half the times he declares it will do him no good, and refuses to take it altogether, and when I do manage to force it down his throat, he makes as much fuss over it as if he were a baby!" And Nelly laughed a little low sad laugh, which wonderfully contrasted with her

cousin's remembrance of her ringing notes of old.

"Perhaps Bertie is not careful enough of himself?" argued Nigel. (How nice it sounded in her ears, to hear him speak the familiar name again). "Keeps too late hours, and goes about too much—I suppose he is very gay and happy now—gay at least compared to the life he led in Bickton."

"I know he keeps late hours," said Nelly, sadly; "but he is not gay, Cousin Nigel, and I fear he is not happy, and that is just what was worrying me to-day before I met you. He seems to be so greatly disappointed in Hilstone—to have expected so much amusement and found so little, that he quite disheartened me."

"Were his anticipations very high then, Nelly?"

"Oh! so high! there seemed no limit to them before I was—I was married," she said with a slight hesitation, for though she felt the comfort of some one to confide in, who notwithstanding their estrangement would take Bertie's part, she feared by being outspoken, to reveal too much. "He thought that living in a town was to procure him everything—health, and pleasure, and society—and he

never could talk sufficiently of all he should gain by the exchange. And I told him otherwise, I told him what I knew was true, that it was impossible with the affliction God had seen fit to put upon him, he could ever run about and enjoy himself like other men, and that if his life easy and comfortable, he should learn to be content. But he would not believe me, he would not see things in the same light as I did, and this is the end of it!" she concluded mournfully, little guessing how much she had told of her own history in this statement of her brother's disappointment. But Nigel Brooke understood it all, and even whilst thinking how mistaken was her devotion, he could feel thankful that she was the same Nelly whom he had fallen in love with, and that if she had been sacrificed in marriage, it was for the sake of others, and not for herself! Yet how his heart bled for her, as they paced side by side, up and down the silent meadows.

"My poor child!" he murmured softly, "*I* could have done better for you than this!"

As soon as he had said the words, he regretted them. He knew that they bore a double meaning, and that Nelly might understand by them that her brother would have been the

happier for not allowing his pride to prevent his accepting his cousin's assistance; at the same time if she had any suspicion of his feelings for her; if the same thoughts were in her mind that moment as were coursing through his own, she might interpret what he had said in its real sense; that whether she loved him or not, he could have made her happier in marriage than he believed her then to be. Curious to ascertain the truth, if possible, from the expression of her face, Nigel Brooke glanced down at the figure by his side and started to find a pair of soft earnest eyes raised in wonderment, to meet his own. For a few seconds the cousins gazed at one another, gazed whilst reality revealed itself to each, and Nigel learned that he was loved; and Nelly, that she might have been his wife. Then the hot blood rushed in a torrent to the girl's face, and her eyes were quickly turned upon the ground, and she felt nothing, and knew nothing, excepting that she trembled, and was ashamed of herself, and sick of life! So they walked together in silence, occupied with their own thoughts.

Nigel had intended next to ask her for some details of her amusements and employments; but after this episode, everything on earth

seemed too frivolous to speak of, and he rejected one topic after another as it rose into his mind.

But before they had proceeded much further, he began to feel that silence is sometimes more dangerous than speech, and with an effort, broke it.

"You have still got Thug, I see!"

With what relief did Nelly hear him speak again in his ordinary voice; and with how much eagerness did she embrace the opportunity to make him believe that she was very cheerful indeed.

"Oh! yes! You didn't think I should part with him, did you, cousin Nigel? My dear old "baby," what should I do without him? But he has been in sad disgrace to-day."

"How is that, I thought he was perfection."

"So he is in my eyes; but you see everyone is not of the same opinion. And Bertie spoils the dog to an unpardonable degree. So I am sorry to say that yesterday, Master Thug forgot his manners, and put his dirty feet upon a lady's dress. Yes! Thug, you did," she continued, as the animal hearing himself named came up to her side, "and to a lady, who hates all dogs into the bargain, both great and small, so of course she didn't like it."

"And what heavy penalty did you award him?"

"He was shut up for some hours in a room by himself, which he cannot bear; but as he had no idea what the punishment was for, I am afraid it will not do him much good. The only effect it has had as yet, is, that directly I let him out, he knocked me right down for joy."

"I hope you have given up that dangerous habit of allowing him to spring at your throat and face, Nelly. It is really not safe, particularly with an animal of so treacherous a nature as a mastiff. I can assure you I have often shuddered to think of the first time I saw him do so. Do you remember it. It was when you were making pastry in the kitchen at Little Bickton."

At the mention of Little Bickton, Nelly's face, which had been doing its best to smile before, again clouded over.

"Ah! I never make cakes or pastry now," she said regretfully, "and I used to like it so much, and how fond Thug was of the raw dough. I used to roll it into pills and make him catch them. But Mrs. Prowse would think it dreadful, I suppose, if I were even to hint at doing such a thing."

"You have pleasanter employments now, I hope," said her cousin, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "or at all events, more suitable ones to your station in life. It is all very well for a woman to know how to make such things as pastry and beds; but when she has a head as well as fingers, she need never be at a loss for occupation. Do you sing, Nelly?"

"A little. I am learning to do so with Dr. Nesbitt."

"And I suppose you are a member of the Hilstone Choral Society."

"Yes! but I hate it, and that reminds me that I must not be late for dinner to-day, as it is practice night. Perhaps I had better go at once."

They had walked back to the end of the first field by this time, and she prepared to return home the same way she had come. She held out her hand at parting, and he took it, and did not seem inclined to let it go again.

"Is there no chance of your brother ever liking me again, Nelly?" he said, looking almost wistfully into her face, "no hope of our ever meeting and mixing as cousins should?"

"I am afraid not," she faltered, "I have

said all I dared, and more, but it has been useless. He seems determined, and he says that it cannot be—that it would not be right."

"But *you* are not afraid to hold my hand, dear; *you* do not regard me only as the son of your father's murderer, do you?"

Not afraid perhaps, but the clasped hands trembled strangely, and Nelly was so nervous that she could not speak. Presently he seemed to guess that he was torturing her, for with a sudden wrench he tore his own hand away.

"You would not, Nelly, believe me that you would not, if you knew all the circumstances of the case. But, of what am I talking? It would be as useless now (as perhaps it would be difficult) to convince you that your brother is in error. Well!" with a sigh, "good-bye, then! but remember, if you are ever in difficulty or distress, that everything I have is at your disposal."

Then he drew a card from his pocket-book—

"This is my town address; a letter sent there will always reach me, and receive immediate attention. Nelly, don't quite forget me; don't cease to care for me, whatever they may try to make you believe or do. We may meet again, who knows what is in the future? and

under happier circumstances than these. Till then, God bless you always!"

He turned hastily, as if to go, but a low sound from her detained him. She had tried to answer him and failed.

"Did you speak, Nelly?" he asked.

"Not now?" she whispered, alluding to his mention of a meeting in the future. "Shall I not see you sometimes as to-day?"

The thought that it might not occur again, revealed to her how dear the present interview had been. She had heard all that her brother had to say against the father of the man before her (and in part she had believed the story and shuddered at it), but she had never been able to connect the disgrace of that circumstance with Nigel Brooke, or permit it to have any effect upon the gratitude she felt she owed him. And she had too recently arrived at the knowledge of her own heart to be able to do more than feel the sweetness of her new sensations; she had had no time to realise their danger, or to calculate their wrong.

To Nigel Brooke, who thought he had never known how much he loved her till he gazed upon her fair young face again, her question was a strong temptation. But he grappled with and laid it. His was no weak heart to

sport with open eyes upon the brink of a precipice, until he became so dazzled that he had no alternative but to cast himself over, or to be dragged away at the risk of life and reason.

He had known his own feelings for some months past, and now to his sorrow, he knew Nelly's; and the fiat had already gone forth—they must part.

"There is little chance of it," he answered, with as much calmness as he could assume, "because I have long made up my mind to let the Chase, and believe, at last, that I have a reasonable offer. So, it is likely that before many weeks, my mother and I shall have left Orpington to take up our residence in London."

Then, his heart torn by the downcast expression of her face, he hurriedly added:

"And if it were not so, Nelly, still we could not—we ought not—to meet. Dear child," looking her steadfastly in the face, "you *know* it will be best for both of us."

It was strange, that in a moment of such misery, that one fond expression should have sunk into the bottom of her heart, and had the power to keep a warm spot there for evermore. Even as she raised her weary eyes to

answer his remark, something of their despondent look had fled before it.

"Yes, you are right," she said, in a low voice, "it *will* be best, for our happiness and for ourselves."

Their eyes and hands met once more, and then Nigel Brooke, sternly denying himself even a backward glance, strode steadily on in the direction of the Chase; whilst Nelly, her brain, heart, and soul, alike in turmoil—Nelly, who had left St. Bartholomew's Street a child —returned to it—a woman!

## CHAPTER VI.

### MRS. CLARENCE RESIGNS HER OFFICE.

For several hours after she had reached her home, Nelly had no time for further thought.

To her dismay she found, upon arrival, that she was later than she had anticipated; the first dinner bell had sounded; Dr. Monkton was already in his dressing-room, and she had to hasten her own preparation as much as possible, lest she should offend him by a want of punctuality.

When they met in the dining-room, things did not appear much more propitious. Her husband was thoughtful and pre-occupied, Bertie evidently sullen, and in her nervous and discomposed state, Nelly yet maintained most of the desultory conversation which ensued.

The labour was so hard, and her efforts to amuse them so ungraciously received by both her companions, that it was quite a relief when, before the meal was concluded, Mrs. Prowse arrived to bear her off to the Choral

Society, even though that lady did not appear to be in her most amiable mood on the occasion.

Nelly was playing with her dessert when her sister-in-law entered the room, and did not stir, until roused by the tart observation :

"If you intend to dawdle about much longer, Mrs. James, I must go without you. It is most important that I should not be late at the meeting this evening, for Laura Filmer has so bad a cold, that she will be unable to attend, and it won't do for us both to be absent. So if you mean to accompany me, I shall be obliged by your getting ready at once."

"I beg your pardon," said Nelly, mechanically, as she rose from the table. "I had no idea you were in a hurry."

But Robert Brooke resented the dictatorial style of Mrs. Prowse's address, and to his sister's annoyance, came to the rescue.

"Is Nell *obliged* to go to this choral humbug, Monkton, whether she be ill or well ?" he asked, in the tone of contempt which he knew best calculated to excite the ire of the canon's wife.

"Are you not well, Helena ?" said Dr. Monkton.

Thus directly appealed to, she was compelled to announce that she was.

"What made you imagine she was not?" her husband next enquired of his brother-in-law.

"Mr. Brooke is too apt to consider his sister unequal to any duties which are not undertaken for himself," remarked Mrs. Prowse spitefully.

"And Mrs. Prowse to urge her to take a part in anything in which it is impossible her brother can share," he retorted, with less politeness than was due to the sex of his opponent.

Nelly, distressed beyond measure at this budding altercation, stood with the handle of the door in her grasp, uncertain whether to stay or to retreat; whilst Dr. Monkton listened to the audacity of Robert Brooke with evident surprise.

"And what the devil is it to you whether she does or not?" he said, angrily addressing his brother-in-law. "Helena has a tongue, and can speak for herself, I suppose; we want none of your interference," and waving his hand, he signed to Nelly to go upstairs; whither she soon heard herself followed by Bertie, who went into his own room, and after violently slamming, locked the door behind him.

She would gladly have excused herself then from accompanying Mrs. Prowse to the choral meeting, for she feared the consequence of leaving the two angry men in the house together, but she dared not make the breach wider than it was. So in a few minutes the sisters-in-law commenced their walk to the Mechanics' Institute, which they accomplished without having exchanged more than half-a-dozen words.

There had been a sad amount of bickering going on amongst the members of the choral society during the last few weeks. The dignity of those ladies who belonged to the ecclesiastical party had been quite unable to stand against the affront offered to it in the shape of a Mrs. Clarence from "the barracks," being invited to stand up and lead their choruses; and poor Mr. Rumbell had wondered ever since how he could have been so rash as to propose it.

He had been besieged, both in public and private, attacked alike in his sacred bachelor dwelling and in the High Street, by bevys of excited females, bearing copies of the printed rules of the society, which were known to have been drawn up by his own hand.

They thrust them under his nose, they forced

him to read over Rule VI., by which it was set forth that:

"In order to preserve the general harmony so essential to the well-doing of the Society, no member, resident in Hilstone, shall be selected for the purpose of singing the solos of the various works performed, but that if no non-resident member can be found fit to undertake such solos, the Society shall provide a professional person at the quarterly concerts for that especial purpose;" and refuted all his arguments in favour of Mrs. Clarence *not* being a resident but a visitor, by asserting that, in that case, he had no right to have admitted her at all, as the Society had been formed for the benefit of the towns-people; in fact, Mr. Rumbell found that he had got himself into a regular scrape, and he almost wished Mrs. Clarence had been dumb, before he had been struck by the beauty of her soprano voice.

"But who else is there to take the solos?" he exclaimed at last, despairingly, as grey curls and spectacles closed in around him, and shrill remonstrances vibrated on his ear; "only tell me that, ladies! Who is there, in Hilstone or out of Hilstone, who is competent to sing for you as Mrs. Clarence does? If you

can find me a non-resident member to take her place, the exchange shall be made, but till then, you must permit me a little license in this matter."

Their president had said the words, and for a while they left him in peace, though they were anything but at rest themselves. From that hour, the object of Mrs. Prowse and Mrs. Roe, and Miss Hammond and others of the same clique, was to search the neighbouring towns and villages for a non-resident member, with a soprano voice—for there were many people living out of Hilstone, who belonged to the Society, but only attended the practices during the summer evenings.

At last they were successful; Mrs. Roe was the fortunate woman who hit upon a young girl, the daughter of the clergyman of the hamlet of Wickley, who certainly possessed all the elements of a fine voice, but who was so young and shy, and ignorant, that she had not the least idea of using it. However there were the notes; Miss Grey (as she was called) was proved capable of taking the upper C with almost as much force as Mrs. Clarence herself ("and certainly with far more delicacy," as Mrs. Roe observed), so after having been invited for several consecutive evenings to that

lady's house, to be instructed by herself and her intimates in the parts required of her, she was dragged before the president of the choral society, and produced as a substitute for the obnoxious officer's wife.

Poor Mr. Rumbell was fairly trapped; he had passed his word, and he could not depart from it. He had drawn up Rule VI. himself, and dared not deny the work of his own hands. Here was the non-resident member; blushing, indeed, and ready to sink into the earth with confusion when called upon to exhibit her talents; but with the requisite register to render her a fit candidate for the honour of taking the solos of the Society. Yet when he thought of her as an exchange for Mrs. Clarence, the pupil of Garcia, he seemed for the first time to realise the extent of feminine jealousy.

"She'll never do!" he said, trembling himself at the idea of having to tell the other lady that she must resign the ungracious task she had undertaken. "Her voice is very fair, but she knows too little of singing, Mrs. Roe. She will break down at the first obstacle."

"She will do no such thing, Mr. Rumbell!" rejoined Mrs. Roe, with asperity; "she only

wants practice to enable her to sing quite as well, if not better, than *that* Mrs. Clarence! Besides, you passed your word, remember; to say nothing of the rules. If the printed rules of the Society are to be put aside for every stranger who happens to have a tolerable voice, they had better never have been made. Let us keep to them, and then we shall know what to expect. Otherwise, in saying that I should no longer take any pride in belonging to the Society, I know that I speak, not only my own opinion, but that of Mrs. Prowse, Mrs. Allondale, and all the other members of any influence—not excepting Mrs. Filmer herself."

Mr. Rumbell grew alarmed. If these women—old women, as they were—chose to join in opposition to himself, and the dean's daughter-in-law seconded the movement; either the choral society or his presidentship must go to the wall. And in either case he would incur considerable odium at the hands of the cathedral party.

So, without being the first of his sex who has been over-ruled by circumstances and petticoats, he gave his consent that Miss Grey should be presented to the members as their future soloist; and the evening of which this

chapter treats was the one appointed for her introduction. Nelly had heard nothing of all this; she took too little interest in the meetings; and was altogether too insignificant for Mrs. Prowse to have considered it worth her while to enlighten her. Besides, she and her party were anticipating with keen delight, the surprise and discomfiture of Mrs. Clarence's admirers, when the announcement should be made.

As for Miss Filmer, she had no cold at all, but she was so disgusted with the whole proceeding, that she had vowed she would not be present on the occasion; and that if it really took place she should strike her name off the subscribers' list the following morning. But her opinion was as nothing compared to her mother's, to which it was generally opposed. Confused as Nelly's thoughts were, and wandering from the scene before her, she could not help, as soon as she had taken her seat, remarking the various glances of importance, mystery, and congratulation, which were being exchanged between Mrs. Roe and her friends, now speculating on the possible identity of the extremely bashful looking young lady, who, with downcast eyes and burning cheeks, was placed in a prominent position on the

sopranos' bench, supported, on either side, by Mrs. Prowse and Miss Fanny Clewson.

They were shortly followed by the entrance of Mrs. Clarence, who, with her books in her hand, sat quietly down in her accustomed seat. Nelly thought that the president was more fidgety than usual; but as he was always pale and nervous-looking, his discomposure did not make much difference in his appearance.

The practice commenced: as the orchestra played the last bars of the overture, and the singers rose to be ready for the opening chorus, Mrs. Clarence standing a little to the front, as was her wont, the atmosphere seemed to have become suddenly closer to Mr. Rumbell, for he drew forth his handkerchief, and wiped his face repeatedly. The final chord came: Mrs. Clarence, her eye fixed on his batôn, was about to commence her part, when the wand of the leader fell, and he gave a couple of nervous taps with it, to command attention.

"I have a few words to say," he stammered, "before commencing this evening's practice. I am quite sure that we have all been most sensible of the great kindness shown by this lady" (waving his batôn towards Mrs. Cla-

rence) "in taking our solos, and singing them so ably for us; still I find—" here Mr. Rumbell was again obliged to have recourse to his pocket-handkerchief—"that in accepting her valuable services, we have been breaking one of the most stringent rules of our little Society; and broken rules, you know, ladies, sometimes lead to broken heads." Here the president tried to smile with a feeble merriment on the many faces turned towards him, of which he could distinguish but the face of Mrs. Clarence, filled with calm surprise.

"It is one of the rules of Hilstone Choral Society that no resident member shall sing a solo, and we were obliged to make this rule because ladies are known to be so sadly jealous of one another. If the Society had been composed of gentlemen only, I don't think we should have needed such a restriction at all."

This witticism was received with great giggling by most of the female members, and Nelly observed that the older the ladies were the more they seemed to giggle. Only Mrs. Clarence remained perfectly still, and apparently unmoved.

"We have been obliged to forget all about

this rule for the last few weeks, because we were so very anxious to practise 'Haydn's Seasons,' for our next concert, but as we have now been sufficiently fortunate as to find a young lady who is a member of our Society, and yet non-resident in Hilstone, but who promises to be good enough to come over from Wickley every Wednesday evening, to take our solos for us, why, all I can say is—" here Mr. Rumbell's breath seemed to be drawn with considerable difficulty—" all I need say on the part of myself as president, and yourselves as members, of this society, is, that our united and most grateful thanks are due to Mrs. Clarence for all the trouble she has taken to oblige us, and—" struggling back to the jocose strain—" we feel very glad to think that we have now an opportunity of lightening her labours, and giving her a holiday in fact." Then with a little stiff cock-sparrow bow, which was intended to be the personification of ease, Mr. Rumbell, as it were, dismissed Mrs. Clarence, and continued—

" Miss Grey, who will in future undertake our solos, is kind enough to say that she will commence doing so from to-night."

Mrs. Clarence bowed to the president in return for his salutation, but showed no sign

of resentment. She did not even resume her seat, but drawing back to a level with the other singers, joined in the chorus as heartily as usual.

Poor Miss Grey, on the contrary, who was now thrust forward by her officious friends, coloured violently, and exhibited all the symptoms of conscious guilt, whilst the music which was being sung in her ears, sounded like an indistinct clang, and her vision became so blurred and dim that she could not distinguish a note in the book she held before her.

The chorus ceased; the assembly waited for her recitative. The girl looked up, and looked down; the tears rushed to her eyes and over her burning cheeks, and she dared not trust her voice alone in the silence which succeeded.

"Now, Miss Grey," said the president waving his batôn, as a signal for her note—but no note came.

"Here, dear, perhaps you've lost your place," exclaimed Mrs. Prowse, whose patronage was generally accompanied by familiarity. Mrs. Roe's hawk-like eye glanced fearfully at her from the other side of the room, whilst her minor upholders smiled compassionately, and murmured "Poor dear, she feels a little

timid at first. I daresay she'll soon get over it, and it's much better than being too bold, in my opinion."

"Try, Miss Grey," urged the president, "it's only fancy, you know; you sing it in a first rate style when at home, and we are all friends here, remember; make a commencement and it will be easy enough."

But though his encouragement was backed by all her patronesses, the new candidate for solo honours continued to shake her head mournfully in reply, whilst the tears rolled steadily down her cheeks. She had contracted a nervous mood and it seemed impossible to her to shake it off.

"What's to be done now?" exclaimed Mr. Rumbell, puffing in the style which had so much amused poor Nelly on her first acquaintance with him.

"Give her a glass of port wine," suggested Mr. Pratt, the tenor canon.

"And where are we to get port wine from?" was the perturbed answer.

"From my house," said Mrs. Roe. "Do run for it, Mr. Pratt, it won't take you five minutes. She ought to have had a glass before she came, poor child, but she would

not be persuaded, though I pressed her to take it."

So after sundry directions, Mr. Pratt set off running to fetch the port wine, and the practice was postponed until his return. Mr. Rumbell spent the interval in pacing up and down the room, with vexation pourtrayed on every feature of his face; whilst the ladies crowded about Miss Grey, who had become slightly hysterical, and was beginning to feel terribly ashamed of herself.

At any other time, the whole of this scene would have proved irresistibly comic to the senses of Nelly Monkton, for there was a great deal of fun to be extracted from the faces of Mrs. Prowse and Mrs. Roe at this dead failure to their enterprise. But the emotion she had herself passed through that afternoon, had left her in the mood to be sympathetic with trouble only, and she thought more of the slight which had been shewn to Mrs. Clarence, and the misery experienced by Miss Grey, than of the others' discomfiture. As soon as the well-shaken port wine had arrived, a couple of glasses were administered almost by force, to the unfortunate soloist; and being again supported to her feet, she managed with the

energy of despair to falter the notes required of her. But she merely scrambled through her task; her voice was raw and unsympathetic, though not more so than her execution; in fine, she had the sound without the soul, and Nelly thought she had never listened to singing which was more distasteful to her.

The practice was concluded, and the singers began to leave; Miss Grey's admirers again crowded about her, laden with congratulation and encouragement, whilst the poor girl herself seemed only anxious to be permitted to take her departure as quickly as possible, that she might hide her diminished head at Wickley.

Mrs. Clarence, having gathered up her music-books, was also crossing the room, when her steps were arrested by the approach of Mr. Rumbell.

"I am so sorry—so very sorry—my dear Mrs. Clarence, that this should have happened; but I hope you will believe that it is not my fault. I had no alternative. The members have compelled me to keep to the printed rules, in which unfortunately no provision was made for a contingency like the present. But I trust you will not wholly

desert us. I trust that we shall still see you here occasionally, and have the aid of your powerful voice and judgment in leading our choruses."

The whole of this address had been delivered in a low tone, for the room was still full of women, eager to gather round and hear what their president had to say to Mrs. Clarence. But that lady's answer was intentionally given in a key which rendered it patent to all.

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Rumbell, for your good opinion, but I could not possibly think of infringing the rights of your chosen soloist by interfering with any part of her work. You are aware that I undertook this office entirely at your request, that I told you at the time it was rather against my own wishes than otherwise. No copy of the rules was shewn to me; I never heard that there were any until to-night. Had I known of the one you allude to, I should have been the first to advise you to respect it. And had I been aware that the society was governed not by yourself and your vice-president, but by the ladies of Hilstone, I should have been the last to join it. As it is, you must permit me to withdraw my name from the members' list,

and to express my regret that its having been placed there, should have been the innocent cause of so much unpleasantness to yourself." And with a general bow to the lingering members, Mrs. Clarence shook hands with Mr. Rumbell, and left the room.

"And there goes the best voice and the most valuable member that our society has ever been able to boast of," exclaimed the president wrathfully as the door closed behind her. "Ladies, I wish you all a very good evening, and I hope you are satisfied with your work. It's more than I am." And with a fearful scowl upon his usually benign countenance, Mr. Rumbell also took his departure.

Matters looked almost too serious then for public discussion, and the group dispersing without further gossip, Nelly shortly afterwards found herself on the steps of her own house, shaking hands with, and saying good-night to Mrs. Prowse; and totally oblivious of the comments on the evening's proceedings, with which that worthy had favoured her all the way home.

As the hall door opened to admit her, and she heard that neither her husband nor her brother had yet returned, she had but one

idea in her mind, that the time had come when she might rest and think.

So she crept upstairs and into bed; and laying her throbbing head upon the pillow, closed her eyes, and in imagination reviewed each event of that most eventful day.

## CHAPTER VII.

### DR. MONKTON'S SENTIMENTS APPEAR TO HAVE UNDERGONE A CHANGE.

But even in that hour of acute pain, Nelly was true to herself. She saw everything plainly now; nothing was undefinable, nothing was hid.

It was as though a curtain had been suddenly withdrawn from before her heart, and all that had appeared foggy and misty in her past life, was rendered clear by its removal. That apparently unreasonable shrinking from marriage for which she had been unable to account, that invisible cord which had seemed to draw her backwards whenever she contemplated such a change, was no longer a mystery to her. Her cousin Nigel loved her, and had circumstances not intervened to prevent his telling her so, she would have been able to recognise her feelings for him under their true name.

But her own blindness, and their subse-

quent separation, had rendered this impossible; and now—it was no use thinking any more about it. She had done that which made any explanation between them futile, and though she had acted, as she imagined, for the best, she felt she had no one but herself to blame for the mistake.

Yet, though her poor little, fevered heart was bent to the earth, beneath its load of disappointment and useless regret, she did not once declare, as a more romantic heroine might have done, that the burthen was too heavy, and she should sink under it.

She did not even toss and tumble on her bed, and moan that life was over for her; and thenceforth all she had to look for, was release from it. Nor did she curse the hour when she had met her husband, or her own folly in having married him.

Nelly's chief thought through life had been her brother, and whilst Bertie remained, she would never acknowledge that it, or its duties, could be over. And she keenly felt, even during this first trial of standing face to face with what she had lost, that though an earlier knowledge of her own heart would have prevented her becoming the wife of Dr. Monkton, it could not, whilst Bertie cherished his pre-

sent resentment, have forwarded a marriage with her cousin. So that her chief sorrow was resolved into a generous pity, for what Nigel himself might suffer. At this thought the poor girl's courage for a moment did seem to fail; and a little prayer went up to heaven that she might be allowed to bear twice—three times the pain, if their mutual Guardian would but lift the burthen off his shoulders.

Her memory flew back to Orpington Chase, and all his kindness to her there, and she wondered she could have been so foolish as not to guess at once how much she loved him. Could she have helped loving him? Did she not remember their interview in the corridor when he kissed her, and how she had wondered afterwards what he could possibly have meant by it? She knew now—she had found it all out when it was too late—and yet she could not feel entirely sorry that it had happened.

Nothing that Bertie had said could influence her thoughts concerning him, however much it might her actions. Even had she not heard Mr. Ray's opinion about her brother's prejudice and obstinacy, she knew enough herself to feel that both were exaggerated. And were it not so, the kindness of the son

had already wiped from off her loving mind the injury of the father.

Nigel had kissed her, he had called her by terms of endearment. She supposed it would never be so again ; but it made her heart less heavy to think of, and her hot hands clasped themselves together as she thanked God for the memory. But then the thought that a memory — an empty, shadowy, unsatisfying memory—was to be her only portion of love in this world, overcame the poor child's heroic gratitude, and she turned her face upon the pillows, and cried quietly to herself.

This patient submission to the inevitable, was entirely in keeping with the conduct of Nelly's whole life. To feel an angry resentment against the will of heaven, would have been as unnatural to her, as to blaspheme her Maker. And yet she suffered none the less because she suffered silently, and would have thought it wrong to refuse any ordinary means by which she might obtain alleviation.

She would gladly have gone to sleep and forgotten her trouble for a while, on the present occasion, but her eyes felt as though they would never close. Soon after midnight she heard her brother return, and listened to his progress up the stairs, which was accompanied

by such an unnecessary amount of noisy talk, that she felt thankful her husband was not at home to find fault with him.

But not until the dawn had broken, was the familiar sound of the doctor's latchkey heard in the door, followed by his entrance to the room which he usually occupied when business had detained him during the greater part of the night. Then, for the first time, the question occurred to Nelly, what should she say to him concerning her interview with Nigel Brooke? She was sadly afraid of the spirit in which both her husband and her brother might receive the news; and her consciousness made her fearful lest, during the recital, she should betray more than she intended of her own feelings regarding it; yet the idea of concealing that she had met her cousin, never struck her mind. She knew that she had done no actual wrong in speaking to him, but had she omitted to mention the fact, the burthen of deception would have laid heavily upon her conscience.

So she resolved that she would relate the circumstance upon the first favourable opportunity; and the only stipulation she made with herself, was, that the confession should take place when both Dr. Monkton and Bertie were present. She felt sure that they would

both gladly unite in seizing the opportunity to censure the actions of her cousin and his father and mother; but then she would not have to go through such a scene twice. One good hearty tirade of mutual abuse against the whole family, might surely serve for both of them; and having arrived at this conclusion, Nelly, more wearied by her varied emotions than she had given herself credit for, fell asleep at last and slumbered heavily till long after her usual hour of rising. Late as it was, however, when she entered the breakfast-room, she found that she was destined to take her meal alone. The doctor was so thoroughly tired from his night's vigil, that he slept till the last moment, and went straight from his bed to his consulting room; and Bertie, whose small stock of strength was visibly giving way beneath the late hours he insisted upon keeping, was too languid to rise before noon. So that it was not until they met at the luncheon-table, that Nelly had an opportunity of speaking to them both together.

She tried then by several means, to bring the conversation round to the subject of her walk of the previous day, without success, for Dr. Monkton was ruminating on a case which just then occupied much of his attention, and

Bertie, she perceived to her sorrow, appeared no better pleased with her than he had done when they parted. So at last, she was obliged to have recourse to plain speaking.

"I took Thug out for a run in the meadows yesterday evening, James," she commenced.

"Did you? it was more than the brute deserved after his behaviour."

"But who do you think I met there?"

"What a stupid question," observed her brother, "when you know every old maid in Hilstone."

"But this wasn't an old maid," she persisted; and then finding that neither of them would try to guess, she added very quickly, "I met Nigel Brooke," and immediately cast her eyes upon her plate, not daring to observe the effect of her intelligence upon her listeners. But it was not so great as she had anticipated.

"What, your cousin from the Chase?" asked her husband.

"That scoundrel!" exclaimed Bertie, reddening at the mere mention of his name, "does he walk in the meadows? You mustn't go there again then, Nelly. I won't have you subjected to meeting him, I only wish I had

been with you. I would have shewn him what I think of him and his doings. Of course you didn't notice him as you passed."

"Of course she did," interposed the doctor, "or I shall be very much displeased with her. Helena knows that I expect my wife to behave like a lady with whomever she is thrown in contact."

"Do you mean to tell me then," said Robert Brooke, "that you expect my sister to be on terms of courtesy with her cousin, after his infamous behaviour to us?"

"Most certainly I do, not only expect, but desire it."

"Then it must be done without my knowledge," retorted the other fiercely, "for if I saw him presume to bow to her, I'd knock him down for it."

Nelly was so anxious to divert her husband's attention from her brother's unpleasant manner, that she had not even leisure to smile at the absurd threat contained in his words.

"But I had no alternative yesterday, Bertie," she exclaimed. "I came upon him quite unexpectedly in the lane at the end of the fields, and had no real excuse to make for refusing to exchange a few words with him. You had never forbidden me, James," she

added more timidly to Dr. Monkton, "or I would not have done so."

"I know I have not," he answered, "nor have I any intention of forbidding you. You have my permission, Helena, to speak to your cousin as often as you may meet him."

At this reception—so widely different from what she had anticipated for her news—Nelly looked up in amazement.

But Dr. Monkton knew what he was about. The constant visits which his professional rival was called upon to make on Mrs. Brooke's behalf, to Orpington Chase, had caused him, of late, to think more than ever that he had been very foolish to quarrel with so profitable a patient. It had been all very well, perhaps, at the time, when his wife had yet to be won, and he was enthusiastic in the prosecution of his love-suit; but since he had fairly settled down as a married man, his disagreement with the Brookes of Orpington had assumed a different aspect, and he would have been very pleased to be asked to make it up again. They were the only respectable relations that his wife possessed, and he saw no reason why she should be longer deprived of the benefit of their notice and society. As for the absurd chimeras which her brother had got into his

head, concerning the injury they were supposed to have done him, why he must either get rid of them again, or—(and the probability of this alternative had made itself very patent to Dr. Monkton during the last few weeks)—he must look out for another home in which to indulge his morbid fancies.

But if Nelly was only astonished at this change in her husband's sentiments, her brother entertained very different feelings concerning it. His face from having been crimson with excitement, grew pale with passion, and the lips of his delicate, fractious mouth were firmly compressed.

"You give my sister permission to be on friendly terms with Nigel Brooke, Monkton? You who know all the circumstances of the cause which parted us—who are aware that the hands of his father were stained with the blood of ours, and that I would not allow Nelly even to answer his letters, far less to visit at his house, or hold any communication with him?"

"I am aware that you talk a great deal of nonsense," replied the doctor angrily, "and that I can manage the affairs of my wife without any help from you. You may choose to quarrel with the only relations of any in-

fluence which you possess; but that is no reason that Helena should be forced to follow your example."

"But you quarrelled with them yourself on our account," persisted Robert Brooke, excitedly.

"Pardon me! I did nothing of the sort," interposed his brother-in-law, totally forgetting how he had once averred to the contrary. "My misunderstanding with Mrs. Brooke was purely personal, and one that may be set right any day. I never heard a word of your absurd notions respecting your cousin, until you told me of them yourself. Politeness may at the time have forbidden me to say what I thought of them. But as to carrying them into execution here, it is simply impossible, and whenever I see the opening for a reconciliation between Helena and her aunt, it will assuredly be made."

"But she shall *not* visit at the Chase," exclaimed Robert Brooke, trembling with rage. "As long as I live, my sister shall never clasp hands with the Nigel Brookes, nor acknowledge them as relations. I will not allow it—I will never speak to her again if she does—I will see her *dead* first."

He had risen from his seat during the doc-

tor's speech, and stood supporting himself by the table, and now as he concluded his own, he brought down his fragile hand upon the mahogany with a force which made the purple veins start from beneath the delicate skin.

"Pooh—pooh—pooh!" said Dr. Monkton, carelessly. "Sit down again, Robert. You don't know what you're talking about."

At these words, so coolly and contemptuously delivered, the young man became nearly beside himself. Nelly, who had been watching his irritability and her husband's gathering gloom with the greatest anxiety, (although from fear of aggravating the quarrel she had abstained from interference), pushed her chair close to Bertie, and laid her hand upon his arm as though she would entreat him to be patient. But he shook it off without paying the least regard to her silent plea.

"Monkton!" he exclaimed, "do you intend to insult me?"

"I intend you to fully understand that I alone am master in this house," was the rejoinder. "You talk very glibly, young man, of what you will allow '*your sister*' to do, but you seem to forget that your sister is *my wife*."

"I am her nearest relative," said Robert, hotly.

"The accident of birth which makes you so gives you no power whatever over her, under present circumstances. Helena's obedience is due to me alone, and to me alone it will be paid. You have yet to learn that you can have no authority in this house."

At this plain and irrefutable truth, Robert Brooke was visibly discomposed. He also, of late, had become but too well aware that good feeling alone gave him a claim upon the home which contained his sister. Yet, even this knowledge could not teach him to be prudent, although it made his voice tremble, as he replied:

"That may, or may not be; but so long as I can prevent it, Nelly shall never be friends with Nigel Brooke. You should be the first yourself, Monkton, to forbid it. If you knew all——"

Dr. Monkton turned round and deliberately fixed his sinister eyes upon the face of Robert Brooke.

"And suppose I do know *all!*" he said, speaking rather slowly. "Suppose I know a great deal more than you had the honour or the honesty to tell me! Suppose I have no

higher opinion of you because you tried to keep back half the truth from me!"

At this address, which was incomprehensible to Nelly, she was astonished to see all the excitement fade out of her brother's face, and leave nothing but a weary languor behind. Robert's lips had been parted, and his eyes raised ready to answer any accusation from his brother-in-law; but when Dr. Monkton's words were concluded, he appeared to have nothing to say in reply to them, but sank down upon his seat as though exhausted by the effort he had made. His sister passed her arm round him in token of her ready help and sympathy, whilst her husband, rising to leave the room, paused before he did so, to deliver a parting caution.

"Robert Brooke! Let us understand each other. I have said very little as yet about your behaviour since you have been under my roof, although it has in many respects been by no means satisfactory to me. But whilst I rule this establishment, and you remain a member of it, I must beg that you conform in all things to its requirements. We must have no more exhibitions such as that of to-day. If my friends—or my wife's friends—are so objectionable to you, that you cannot meet

them with the courtesy of a gentleman, you have the alternative ; to go where you will run no risk of offending either them or myself," —and Dr. Monkton passed out of the room.

This then was the upshot of all Robert's day dreams ! — this the realization of that vision in which Nelly and himself drove proudly by Mrs. Brooke of Orpington Chase, without deigning the faintest recognition ; this the manner by which they were to prove to their cousin Nigel that they disdained to accept not only his assistance but his acquaintance ! Nelly was desired to notice him whenever they met ; and her husband's positive intention was to bring about a reconciliation between the families as soon as possible. The idea was so mortifying ; it so fully proved his own impotency to convince his hearers of what he believed himself, that Robert Brooke in mourning his defeat and disappointment had scarcely any time to wonder at the marvellous change which his brother-in-law's sentiments appeared to have undergone. He realised the first misfortune, indeed, so vividly, that Nelly was shocked to see that tears trickled through the thin fingers with which, as soon as they were alone, he had covered his face.

"Bertie! Bertie, my darling!" she exclaimed, "pray don't let it worry you like this. There is no need indeed; James is angry at your setting up your opinion against his, and has said more than he intends to do. He would never dream of bringing Nigel Brooke here, and I do not even think he will have the opportunity, for I heard yesterday that he and Aunt Eliza are going to live in London." And in her alarm and solicitude for her brother, Nelly seemed to have forgotten all that made her own misery in the case. But Bertie refused to be comforted. He had weakened himself so much lately by dissipation, of which his sister, from her enforced separation from him, had little idea, that he had lost even the small amount of command, which he had been used to hold over himself, and at this total upset of his unworthy ambition he had completely broken down.

"Promise me, Nell!" he said, whilst she was clinging about his neck and kissing away the tears which she blushed to see upon his face. "*Swear* to me, that you will never speak to Nigel Brooke or to his mother unless you are compelled to do so, and that if Monkton forces you into their company, you will refuse to say or do more than the most formal civility obliges."

But this promise Nelly hesitated to give.

She loved Bertie as herself; but the experience of the day before had forced her to acknowledge that her affection for him had at last a rival, which claimed at all events to have the power to make her quite as miserable as its predecessor had sometimes done.

So, without loosing her hold of her brother, she only whispered—

"I can't promise that, darling, it would be foolish and useless for me to do so; for if James desires a thing, you know that I must obey him, or it would be the worse for both of us."

She had never hinted so much to Bertie before, of the power her husband held over her, through him. But he was in no mood to be reasonable, or reasoned with.

As his sister's refusal left her lips, he pushed her roughly away from him.

"So you are against me also," he bitterly complained. "I might have guessed as much. You have always had a lurking fondness for Nigel Brooke and his mother, Nelly, and have never fully agreed with me as to the indelible injury for which we are indebted to them. So I have no doubt this determination of Monkton's meets with your entire approval, and

that you will do all in your power to make him keep to it, and that another month will see you as thick as ever at the Chase."

Conscious that much of what her brother said was true, Nelly blushed deeply at his accusation ; but she was perfectly sincere when she replied :—

"I promise you to do nothing, Bertie, to further a meeting between myself and the Nigel Brookes. I may not have thought entirely as you have in the matter, but you will acknowledge that I have never acted against your wishes in any particular, and, if I had no inclination to do so before, I have still less now. Indeed! I am in earnest," she continued sadly, as her brother turned round to gather from her open face if she were speaking her real mind, "I have no wish to see an intimacy formed again between us : I should try to prevent it if it were likely, for I think it would be the worst thing that could happen for us all."

"I suppose you're telling the truth," said Bertie incredulously ; "but after what Monkton said to-day, I feel as if I should never trust anyone again."

"Not *me*, darling, oh! don't say that of me," she exclaimed in a burst of distress at

the mere supposition, "I have always been true to you, Bertie, you know I have, and shall remain so till I die." And in her endeavours to soothe her brother's fears and restore his good opinion of herself, Nelly quite forgot to ask him to what her husband could have possibly alluded, when he hinted that he knew more about the wretched business which had been the cause of so much trouble to them all than Bertie had had the honesty to tell him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### OLD AGGIE BECOMES COMMUNICATIVE.

It was on a chilly afternoon in the commencement of November, some little time after the occurrence related in the preceding chapter, that Nelly was alone in her dressing-room. She was idle—a fact of no mean significance—that is, her fingers were unemployed, although her brain was busy enough, as having drawn her low chair close to the fire, she sat with her head on her hand, staring into its glowing embers. Many things had occurred during the last few weeks to vex and alarm her. Since the quarrel which they had had regarding Nigel Brooke, words had more than once arisen between Bertie and his brother-in-law, until Dr. Monkton's customary behaviour had grown to be curt and authoritative, and the younger man's either sullen or defiant. And added to this, her outward existence had become more spiritless and dull. Hilstone was not a lively place at the best of times: and

autumn was its most stagnant season. There was positively no out-door distraction for Nelly except the Choral Society practices, and since Laura Filmer had withdrawn her name from the subscribers' list, they were less interesting than they had ever been.

It was a great, and most unfortunate change for a country bred girl, who had been used to run about as she liked, and to have her own way in everything. All the freedom of the dear old life at Bickton was gone for ever, for Mrs. Prowse had even managed of late to discover that walking by herself was a most improper practice for her sister-in-law to indulge in, and brought so many rumours to St. Bartholomew's Street of ladies having been insulted, robbed and frightened when met in the fields alone, that Nelly was strictly forbidden to go there without the protection of a companion. She had heard, and almost with relief, that the tenants of Orpington Chase had taken their departure for London, since it allayed the fear of her husband striving to regain an entrance for her there, and she had hoped also that the chance of meeting her cousin in her daily walks once removed, she should have less difficulty in erasing his image from her memory.

But this hope Nelly had already proved to be a false one. It seemed harder to forget him now that a distance of so many miles was between them : and she found that, added to her former regret, there had sprung up a lively fear, lest amid the attractions and distractions of a town life, her cousin should learn to forget *her*. Though to what end he should remember her, she could not satisfy herself. But her chief cause of anxiety still continued to be her brother. *She* had fallen very submissively into the dull routine of life in a country town ; but Bertie was as discontented as ever, and never putting any restraint on his tongue for prudence sake, openly abused Hilstone and its inhabitants both before the doctor and his sister. And the prospect was growing darker every day, and Nelly felt that all her spirit was fading out of her with the sunshine of the year.

As she was thus sadly ruminating, a knock sounded on her door, and old Aggie's head was thrust into her dressing-room.

"Do Thug happen to be with you, Miss Nelly, my dear?" she enquired, "for Master Robert's been asking after him for the last hour, and I can't see him nowhere."

The old nurse had never been able to tune

her tongue to address her nurseling by any other than her maiden name, and Nelly would not have had her alter it for all the world.

"No! he is not, nurse!" she exclaimed, starting from her reverie, "and now I come to think of it, I have not seen the dear old dog since luncheon time. I wonder where he can be. Perhaps I shut him in the dining-room, do go down and see."

Aggie hobbled away, and Nelly waited anxiously for the sound of her favourite's bark, the token of his release. For times were altering for poor Thug almost as much as for herself. The doctor seldom greeted him now except with a complaint or a kick: and two days before, he had, for some fancied offence, subjected him to a regular thrashing, the first indignity of the sort the mastiff had ever received, but which to Nelly's extreme surprise, Thug hardly resented, as she had imagined that he would; although from his unusually craven bearing since he did not seem to have forgotten it. Since which, she had been more than usually careful lest the dog should be any cause of annoyance, and had almost made up her mind that for his own sake, his liberty must be curtailed, and she must try and reconcile him to the occupation of a kennel.

Yet, former experience made her very loath to adopt this measure until there was no alternative.

She heard old Aggie limp downstairs, and open the dining-room door, but no Thug bounded to answer her summons ; upon which she descended to the kitchen regions, where she remained longer than suited her mistress's impatience, and when she again made her appearance, Nelly met her at the head of the stairs.

"Well! where is he, Aggie?"

"He ain't nowhere about, my dear, not as I can see."

"But don't the servants know where he is?" demanded Nelly, in surprise. "Perhaps he went out with the carriage!"

The nurse had reached the landing by this time, and she put her hard, wrinkled hand on the girl's rounded shoulder, and pressed her to re-enter the dressing-room.

"He's all safe, Miss Nelly ; don't you be afraid for him : but I've had it in my mind to speak to you for several days past, and there's no time like the present. So if you be at leisure, my dear, I'll come in and sit a bit with you, now."

"Come in, Nursey, by all means!" said

Nelly, though half afraid of what she might have to listen to; "it wants an hour to the dressing-bell yet, and it's a long time since you and I have had a talk together."

Old Aggie, who had always been a privileged nuisance with her young mistress, was, as may readily be imagined, still more so now. She had given up a great deal in leaving her quiet little village, and following the fortunes of the brother and sister, and she would have done so for no one less dear to her than Nelly was. She was a most faithful attendant on Bertie, notwithstanding her increasing age and infirmities; and Nelly would have suffered twice as much in being separated from her brother, if she had not felt that he had his nurse with him to supply her place. Poor old Aggie had felt very strange and uncomfortable when she first found herself placed in the midst of half a dozen modern servants, who ridiculed her for the punctilious manner in which she discharged all her duties, and spoke of her employers behind their backs. But her real worth had caused all such little unpleasantnesses, after a while, to melt away, and give place to the respect which she deserved. Still she always averred that she only stayed in Hilstone for the sake of "her child," and

that if anything happened to Miss Nelly, she should be the first to go back to Little Bickton, and leave Master Robert to shift for himself. "As he deserved," she would add, indignantly. But Aggie never ventured to hint at such a contingency to Master Robert's sister, for her nurse was the last remnant of Bickton life which remained to Nelly, and she would have been miserable if she had thought it possible that they could ever be separated again.

When they had entered the dressing-room on the present occasion, and Aggie, (after having carefully ascertained that no listener lurked in the adjoining apartment) had closed both the doors leading to that and to the passage, she took a chair close to her mistress, and bent her face down to hers.

"Miss Nelly, my dear!" she commenced in the husky whisper of old age, "what I want to speak to you about, is Master Robert—he's laying very heavy on my mind, my dear; and I can't feel it right to keep it to myself no longer."

Nelly had little idea but that the woman was going to tell her, what, to her grief, she knew already—that her brother kept hours most unfitted both to his health and respecta-

bility ; but as she had no hope that discussing the fact would remedy it, she tried to evade the subject by saying lightly, though with a heightened colour :

"Why, Nursey, I thought your communication was to concern Thug—at all events, tell me where the dear old dog is."

"I don't think Thug is of much consequence compared to the other," replied old Aggie, "but it's part of my story, anyhow. The dog's been took behind the stables, Miss Nelly, by the doctor's orders, and tied up along with them nasty, hungry-looking greyhounds, and it's all Master Robert's doing—every bit of it !"

Nelly turned quite pale.

"But how is that ?" she exclaimed.

"Why ! it seems when Master Robert came in last night, he caught sight of Mrs. Prowse's cloak, which she had left behind her in the afternoon, a-hanging up in the hall, and what should he go for to do, but to tie it round that dog's neck, and send him to sleep on the landing here, with the hood right over his head !"

"Oh ! how inconsiderate ! how thoughtless !" cried Nelly, "and when I am always begging Bertie to be more careful about offending Mrs. Prowse ! But why didn't you take it off again, Nurse ?"

"My dear!" said the old woman, solemnly, "do you think, if I had gone for to see it, that I wouldn't have took it off again? But I was in the bedroom, and never heard nothing of it till this moment. And when the doctor come in, which he didn't do till quite early this morning, and see the dog lying there, with the cloak wrapped under and over him, Mr. Long says his oaths was something awful; and he ordered him to chain him up behind the stable as soon as ever a place could be made ready for him. And the carpenter's been a knocking up a kennel all the morning."

"And he never told *me*," said Nelly, almost forgetting, in her distress, to whom she was speaking; "how unkind! He might have known it was not *my* fault."

"My dear! the doctor's not a gentleman to speak all that's on his mind, remember! Most like he forgot the order as soon as he had given it!"

"But what can Bertie have been thinking of?" exclaimed Nelly, eager to change the subject from her husband's indifference to her feelings; "What on earth could make him play so silly a trick, and one which he must have known would get the poor dog into a scrape. He pretends to be so fond of Thug,

and yet he does all he can to render him a cause of annoyance!"

"Ah! Miss Nelly! that just brings me to what I feel I must speak to you about. Neither Master Robert's ways, my dear, nor his doings, are such as they ought to be, and if he don't stop them, they'll bring him to great trouble before long."

"Are you alluding to his health, Nurse? I know his cough is very troublesome, poor darling! But this weather is so much against him."

"His cough is bad, Miss Nelly, sure enough, but he makes it a deal worse than he need—not a drop of the mixture can I persuade him to take, either by day or by night. He won't do nothing without you, my dear; and now that you ain't about him so much as you used to be, I might as well speak to that there table, I'm sure it's little rest I get at night, now-a-days, and it's little rest he can get himself, either, poor lad—for if I'm wore out with the constant noise of his coughing, what must he be with the exertion!"

Nelly's answering sigh came from the bottom of her heart. She had known all this before, and had pondered and wept over it, without finding any possible remedy. Bertie was

obstinate, so was her husband; and between the two she could do nothing!

"But that ain't the worst of it, Miss Nelly, by a long deal," continued old Aggie.

"What *can* be worse," said Nelly. "He'll kill himself if he will not listen to reason."

"He's going a much shorter way to do that, my dear, than by refusing all the medicine in the world."

"What do you mean, Nurse?" exclaimed the girl, suddenly turning to the old woman, and seizing her arm. "Oh! what *do* you mean? tell me quickly."

"Miss Nelly, my bird! do you remember the night at Bickton Farm, before you writ to tell the doctor as you'd take him?" said Aggie, gazing steadily at the eager face upturned to hers, whilst she fondly stroked the hand which had grasped her own. The bright flush of excitement which had mounted to Nelly's cheeks receded from them little by little, leaving a deadly pallor behind it. Remember it! ah! did she not? the unsteady gait, the horrid sickly leer, the unintelligible babble, which had so shocked and frightened her! She read the truth at once in Aggie's compassionate glance, and closing her eyes as though she would shut out sense and feeling,

Nelly leaned back in silence on her chair. The old woman, alarmed at her appearance, scrambled up from her seat, and procuring a bottle of eau-de-cologne from the dressing-table, poured it plentifully over her mistress's face and hands.

"That will do, Nurse," said Nelly quietly, as the fragrant scent ran down her neck and bosom, "don't be frightened; I never faint, you know, and I feel all right again now, and able to listen to what you have to say. But," —with an effort to restrain her emotion— "pray be quick about it."

"There ain't much more to tell, my dearie," resumed the nurse. "I wish I had been dead before I had to tell it, but I feel you ought to know. As it was then, Miss Nelly, so it is now; and not once, but almost every night in the week. You don't see it, my dear, because he lies late of a morning, and you're in bed before he returns of a night; but all the servants know it for a truth. Why, he's just as often carried up them stairs as he walks them, Miss Nelly. And that will account to you for all his tricks, for half the times he knows no more what he's doing than the babe unborn."

Nelly recalled with a shudder the various

noises to which she had so often listened on Bertie's return, without guessing the cause; and from shame and vexation combined, she began to cry.

"Now, don't you do that, Miss Nelly!" urged the old nurse, "it can't do him no manner of good, you know, and it may do yourself some harm. But, as you must perceive, such habits is quite sufficient to ruin anyone's health, let alone a sickly creature like Master Robert. Why at this rate his life won't be worth a day's purchase soon."

"But where does he get it, Nurse? where does he get the stuff which makes him in that horrid state?" asked Nelly with averted eyes and burning cheeks.

"Lor', my dear, in a town like this he can get it in a dozen places. He didn't find no difficulty remember, even at Bickton; and when a man's once set upon that course he'd find a tap in the sandy desert. It isn't my usual way you know, Miss Nelly—to speak of the concerns of my betters—I've been reared very different from that: but I thought it was my duty when I see how Master Robert was going on, just to ask John where he mostly wheels him to of an evening. And it seems that his favourite place is the 'Feathers,'

where they keep a billiard-table unbeknown; and where, if he's ever likely to fall in company with a gentleman, 'tain't with such a one as you would like to see your brother making friends with, nor as the doctor would be pleased to hear that he even knew. And John says that he's there regular, for two or three hours almost every night, and that when he ain't fit to walk, they sends him home in a fly or a chair. And a pretty lot of his money, I'll lay, they've took from him before now."

"Aggie," exclaimed Nelly, horror struck at the woman's recital, "what can I do? what can I say to convince Bertie that he is ruining himself?"

"I don't see that it will be any manner of use your speaking to him, Miss Nelly. Most likely it will only aggravate him to do worse. He ain't a pliable nature, Master Robert, nor never were. From a baby the only way to get him to do anythink, was to beg of him not."

"But it *must* be put a stop to," said Nelly; "I should never forgive myself if I did not try, Aggie! I will speak to him at once," and she rose as if for the purpose. But the nurse detained her.

"Speak to the doctor, my dear, that's your only plan. Nothing else won't do no good."

"To Dr. Monkton," exclaimed the girl in alarm, "oh! no, Aggie, he would be so angry, he would never forgive him; and then Bertie and he might come to words about it, and there is no saying how it would end."

"Angry about it, Miss Nelly? In course he would; 't would be a marvel indeed, otherwise. But that's just what may be the saving of Master Robert. Your speaking won't do no good. You'll kiss him and cry over him, and beg him for his own sake and your'n to be more steady, and he'll swear to all you ask him, and be just the same two days afterwards. But let the doctor, as has the real authority in this house, tell him as he won't stand it no longer from him, and it 'll make all the difference in the world. Now, do try it, my dear. Go to your husband on the first opportunity, and tell him how Master Robert's going on, and beg of him to save his health and his life for you. The doctor won't refuse you nothing, my bird. He loves you too much surely, to wish to see you unhappy. Lor', lor'! what a deal you've gone through in your short life," continued the old woman as Nelly's face was hidden in her lap, "he's

amost wore you out, my blessing, with his whims and his ways, but there's a reward for you up above, never fear. And there'll be a reward for you here below too, if I don't mistake ; for 'tis morally impossible that anyone with a human heart, could stand out for ever against such patient love as your'n."

## CHAPTER IX.

THUG SLEEPS ON THE LANDING FOR THE LAST TIME.

But notwithstanding all her nurse's persuasions to the contrary, Nelly could not make up her mind to ask the advice of her husband on the subject of Bertie's delinquencies. She knew at once too little of him—and too much! Too little, when that sweet familiarity and perfect confidence which ought to exist between persons connected by so close a tie are taken into consideration, and too much as regarded his undisguised antipathy towards her brother.

But, to put in a word of entreaty for poor Thug was an easier task. In her horror and shame at the distressing news which Aggie had told her about Bertie, Nelly had almost lost sight of the annoyance which she would otherwise have felt at her favourite being put in durance for his sake. But in reality, it was no small trouble to her. She was fresh and

childlike in most of her feelings, and she loved the dog, as only girls before the cares of maternity come upon them, can love the animals which they have reared for themselves. From the hour when he had been first presented to her, a little blind puppy with a very wide mouth, the mastiff had been her constant companion and friend. To him she had confided, very foolishly no doubt, everything which either gave her pain or pleasure, but as amongst his other virtues, Thug did not possess the faculty of repetition, his mistress might perhaps have chosen her confidant less wisely. Throughout his existence of seven years' duration, a short space enough to the man of middle-age, but a considerable item when deducted from Nelly's nineteen summers, her dog and she had never been separated, except on that memorable occasion when she left her home for Orpington Chase. From his whining puppyhood, when she would proudly take him out for a run upon the common, and losing the scent and sound of her advancing footsteps, he would throw his little head into the air and turn round and round in yapping helplessness until she ran back to pick him up again; throughout his romping, rollicking youth, and the sedate though not

less rough attentions of his maturity, Thug and his mistress had been the most inseparable of allies. He had always accompanied her in her walks ; sat beside her at her meals, and lain snoring outside her bedroom door at night. He had been reared so tenderly, and treated so well, that he hardly knew the meaning of correction, and a chain and collar were immediate signals for his rebellion. Nelly knew this perfectly, and the idea of what the animal must be suffering tied up amongst strangers, and in a strange place, worried her greatly ; and, added to which, Thug had not been well during the previous week. He had never thrown out the distemper so decidedly as to be unmistakably such ; and she had more than once remarked lately from his heavy drooping look and loss of appetite, that she feared he was going to take to baby-disorders in his old age. Every now and then, during the pauses in the meal which was just past, a long mournful howl, too far off to be distinctly heard, but quite near enough to catch her listening ear, had nearly driven the tears into her eyes ; and when, after dinner, she found herself alone with her husband, her anxiety for Thug's restoration to his good graces overcame the

natural timidity which she felt on approaching so dangerous a subject.

Bertie—with whom the dog was almost as great a favourite as with his sister—had evidently learned the reason of his disappearance, for he had scarcely opened his lips all dinner-time; but Dr. Monkton, who had, as old Aggie surmised, "most-like forgot the order" as soon as he had given it, was much the same in manner as usual. But evidently some very unpleasant recollection attached to the circumstance, for as soon as Nelly mentioned the dog's name, his brow clouded over, and his face assumed a look of the greatest determination.

"James!" she commenced hurriedly, "I have missed poor old Thug so this afternoon."

She was sitting under the lamp-light, engaged in needlework. She did not go and throw herself down by the side of her husband, as on a former occasion, for since she had arrived at a more perfect knowledge of her heart, Nelly had felt a shrinking from him which she had tried in vain to overcome. Any chance of her loving him had been nipped in the bud long before; but now, even her unreserve shrunk abashed into a corner, as though merely to show itself mere deception. When

she had ventured to make her remark she glanced up fearfully, to see how it had been taken.

Dr. Monkton was standing by the mantelpiece, and frowning terribly.

"You must learn to do without him, anyhow, Helena, for I have no intention of setting him at liberty again."

The work dropped from her hands upon the table.

"Oh! not really, James? You are not in earnest? If he is not let loose to sleep in the house as usual he will howl so dreadfully all night, and I shall lie awake and listen to him."

"If that is the case," replied the doctor coolly, "he must be muzzled."

"But he will be frantic, James! He will go mad. Thug has never been used to any restraint in his life."

"Then it is high time he became used to it," replied Dr. Monkton. "A mastiff is not a proper dog for the house; he is not even a safe dog to keep loose about the premises."

"He has never hurt anyone since he was born," said Nelly mournfully, "and he will fret so dreadfully, away from Bertie and me. Just hear how he is howling at this moment! Oh!

James—*do* let him loose. He shall never come into the sitting-rooms nor annoy you in any way, if you will but let him stay here as he used to do. He will die if he is always kept chained up to a kennel."

At the idea of a powerful brute like Thug dying of a chain and collar, Dr. Monkton laughed immoderately.

"You don't know what nonsense you are talking, Helena! However, if being kept in his proper place is to prove the death of Thug, I am afraid he must be sacrificed—for he will never take up his abode in this house again. I am tired of having my property and that of my friends, destroyed by an animal."

"But that wasn't Thug's fault," exclaimed Nelly, almost forgetting whose it was in her anxiety to defend her favourite.

"Perhaps so," returned her husband; "but it is not the first time that he has been made the means of annoyance to my friends, and a direct defiance of my own orders. Your brother has done all he can to upset the peace and regularity of this household, Helena; but I have at all events removed one temptation out of his reach. He will no longer have Thug to practise any of his drunken tricks upon. We shall see what method he next

adopts of exhibiting his gentlemanly behaviour and feelings."

At this avowal that her husband was aware of what she had trusted he was in ignorance, Nelly grew so alarmed that she had no further anxiety to waste upon poor Thug. She clasped her hands together and looked up into his face imploringly as she exclaimed :

"Oh ! James—I never heard of it until to-day—I had no idea of such a thing until old Aggie told me. And she says that poor Bertie coughs so dreadfully all night that she can get no rest for listening to him."

"I know he does," replied the doctor, totally unmoved, as he drew a toothpick from its case, and commenced to use it.

"And it is worse—so much worse than it used to be."

"I know it is," he repeated, as indifferently as before.

"But, James ! he will *kill* himself if he goes on like this."

"Of course he will," replied Dr. Monkton, still busily employed upon his teeth.

Nelly gazed at him for a moment, as if it were impossible that he could be in earnest, and then, as she marked the cold, sarcastic, unchanged expression of his face, she sprang

at him, as though she had gone wild, and shook him by the arm.

"James! James! for God's sake don't look at me like that! Say that you will save him! tell me that you will do all in your power to restore him to health, and break him of these dreadful habits! You *can* do it! You know you can do it if you try! It is but such a little while that he has taken to them; surely it will not be so difficult to win him back again! My speaking is of no avail, but he will listen to you if you reason with him kindly. Oh! James, say that you will talk to him, for my sake!"

But Dr. Monkton, once bent upon a thing, was not the man to be moved by a woman's tearful entreaties. He quietly disengaged himself from the excited grasp of his wife's hand, and resumed the operation with which she had interfered.

"I intend to speak to him," he replied, "and very decidedly, but I have no such hopes of the result as you appear to entertain! and as to his cough, it has gone too far. Medicine may alleviate it, perhaps, but nothing will stop it until his breath is stopped altogether."

She had relinquished her hold of him, and sunk down into her former place, and when

his cruel words were ended, nothing was to be heard in the room but the sound of her quiet sobbing.

Sympathising so little with the cause, the sight of Nelly's grief had no power to move Dr. Monkton, and after the silence of a few minutes, he deliberately wiped his toothpick, replaced it in its case, and left the room, and when he had adjusted his great coat in the hall, she heard him quit the house. For a long time she remained there, with her face buried in her hands, considering what was best to be done. One thing was evident, she must act alone; it was useless, at all events in his present mood, to look for aid or advice to her husband.

And the danger was imminent; there was no time to be lost; she must see, and speak with Bertie before he had an interview with Dr. Monkton, that she might implore him for both their sakes, to be patient and forbearing, and not bring his disagreement with his brother-in-law to an open rupture.

As the thought struck her, she rose to seek him, lest by any chance he might be in his own room; but, as usual, he was absent. Then Nelly's mind, distracted for the moment from the work she had in hand, reverted to

her dog, and wrapping a warm cloak about her shoulders, with the hood over her head, she ventured out upon a visit to the stables. The grooms and coachman, who were snugly enjoying their pipes and newspapers by a fire in the harness-room, were quite startled by the sudden appearance of their young mistress, until they heard the errand on which she had come. But they all knew how she loved her dog, and had been proportionately indignant at receiving orders to tie him up. The coachman himself volunteered to guide her to the mastiff's kennel, and through the damp and dirt of the outbuildings Nelly followed him gladly, in hopes of carrying some comfort to her disconsolate Thug.

"He ain't 'owled 'alf so much, ma'am, the last hour or so," remarked the coachman, who instinctively felt that his lady required a little cheering on the subject. "It don't come natural to him to be tied up just at first, I dare say, but he'll get used to it by-and-bye, ma'am, as you'll see, and enjoy his runs all the more for not having been loose all day. There's the kennel, ma'am, I had it placed very snug and dry, knowing he'd been so pampered, so he won't come to no harm of wet or cold. Here! Thug, Thug! old fellow!" and the

coachman whistled, and Nelly called, and then the stable lantern, which the former carried, was turned upon the kennel, and to their surprise it was empty.

"Well, now, that's strange!" said the man. "He can't have broke away, for here's the chain and collar, and yet I never hear no one about the place this evening. But master, he come to the stables before he went out, ma'am, to give his orders concerning the horses, and I shouldn't at all wonder if he took it in his mind to give the dog a run. Any way, he can't be lost."

Nelly was not at all afraid of this herself, she even thought it might be as the coachman had suggested, and, hoping that if her husband proved better than his word in one instance, he might do so in the other, she hurried back to the house. Contrary to her customary obedience, and notwithstanding Aggie's evident desire to get her into bed, she sat up till twelve o'clock that night, in hopes of seeing and speaking with her brother; but when the hour struck without having brought him home, fear, lest her husband should be the first to return, made her comply with the nurse's entreaties, that she would at least disencumber herself of her apparel. But two

minutes afterwards she repented her tardy acquiescence, for hardly was she robed in her dressing-gown, before the stoppage of a fly at the front door, and the subsequent sound of Bertie's voice in the hall, told her that what she had waited for was at hand.

Old Aggie left her to receive her master, and Nelly stood with the door of her dressing-room just unclosed, ready to call to her brother as soon as he should have reached the landing; but what was her chagrin and disappointment when his slow progress upstairs was accomplished, to see that he was accompanied by both Long and the footman, and that it evidently was as much as they could do to persuade him to go quietly to his bed; and following close upon his footsteps, not with his usual impetuous rush, but inertly and heavily, she saw to her amazement—Thug!

Bertie appeared in the highest spirits. By the lamp on the landing, and the candle carried by the nurse, Nelly could perceive that the flush on his delicate face, the false brilliance in his eyes, and the careless manner in which his hair was tossed back from his forehead, gave him a debonnair air, which, whilst it struck a chill to her heart, was infinitely becoming to himself. He looked so handsome,

as he stood at the head of the stairs, alternately joking with the men-servants, and abusing the poor old nurse for begging him to come into his bedroom, and she felt him to be so very dear, that it was as much as she could do to refrain from leaving her room, and joining her entreaties to those of his attendants; but she trusted every moment that Aggie's persuasion might prove successful, and that the men might go away again, and leave her at liberty to do as she chose.

But the next minute she perceived that the difficulty lay in the fact that Bertie would not permit Long to take the mastiff back again to the stables.

"The dog sleeps *here*," he said authoritatively. "He has always done so, and I will not permit him to be removed. Here Thug! my good fellow! there's your bed!" and he pulled a fluffy sheepskin mat from before the door of Dr. Monkton's dressing-room, and threw it down in the centre of the landing; and upon which, Thug, in the same heavy, drooping manner, immediately ensconced himself.

But the servants evidently foresaw, what Nelly had at once realised, that this fresh act of rebellion would be the cause of an aggra-

vated quarrel between the doctor and his brother-in-law, and endeavoured all they dared to dissuade the young man from persisting in his determination.

"Now, Mr. Brooke," said Long, speaking as though he addressed an obstinate child, "do let me take the animal down again. He'll lie just as comfortable in his kennel as here, you know; and the doctor will blame me perhaps, if he finds him on the landing again."

"Blame you?" loudly exclaimed Bertie, "and what if he does? If he blames you, give him warning, that's my advice. Don't stand his nonsense any more than I do. As to that dog, he belongs to me, and not to the doctor. He may tie up his own mangy hounds as much as he likes; and himself too, into the bargain; but he sha'n't tie up my mastiff, and if he's bent upon it, let him do it himself, ha! ha! Let him come up here with a chain and a collar, and lay a finger upon Thug when I've once told him to lie still, ha! ha! He'll see what he'll get for his pains. Your doctor won't cure himself in a hurry after that, ha! ha!"

At this most thoughtless speech, the men grinned as servants will when their superiors lower themselves for their amusement. The

old nurse in vain put in her feeble warnings, and Nelly shrunk behind the door deeply ashamed for her brother, and fearful lest she should be known to have overheard him.

"But, we could bring him up the first thing in the morning, sir," urged the footman, anxious only to get the dog away until his owner should have recovered his senses. "They'll be wondering what's become of him down at the stables, and coming up here, may be, to enquire. Better let him go back for to-night, sir."

But Robert Brooke was not to be persuaded; he swore with an oath, such as his sister had never heard proceed from his mouth before, that the mastiff should pass the night on that rug, and no where else; and that if the doctor saw him there, all the better, it was just what he wished and intended him to do.

"Bertie, Bertie dearest, let him go," exclaimed Nelly, at this juncture, forgetting everything but the dread of her husband's anger.

"Holloa, my darling, are you there?" replied Bertie, all his real feeling for her bubbling to the surface in the unguarded state into which he had thrown himself. "You

won't have old Thug kicked out on a night like this, Nelly dear, will you ?"

"Let him go, dear Bertie, pray let him go, I implore you," she said, retreating behind the door as her brother staggered up against it.

"You faithless vixen !" he exclaimed, "have *you* gone over to the Philistines ? Old Thug won't thank you for your advice, Nell. Why, where are you hiding yourself ? Come out of that !" and with a rude effort, he pushed the door wide open.

By that time Nelly was in the centre of the room, but the men servants thinking that the scene was best without a witness, after one or two ineffectual attempts to coax Thug to follow them, went down stairs again, leaving Robert Brooke alone with the women.

Nelly saw, of course, that it would be useless attempting to speak to her brother that night upon the subject which occupied her mind. All she could do, was by coaxing, entreaty, and numberless caresses, to induce him, as soon as might be, to retire to his bed. But the task was by no means an easy, or a speedy one. Poor Bertie happened to be in a very loving mood, and Nelly had missed his old tenderness so grievously of late, that she had

not the heart to cut his little grateful and repentant speeches short. But as soon as she had persuaded him (by many a promise not to quit his side until he should be fast asleep) to lie down, and having watched him fall off into a heavy slumber, had gently disengaged her hand from his clasp, she hurried again upon the landing. All her thought now was, how to get rid of Thug, before her husband returned. The dog was sleeping as she imagined, upon the rug which Bertie had thrown to him; but when, with the candle in her hand, she stooped to pat his head, she saw that his eyes were open.

"I am sure that Thug is not well," she remarked to Aggie, who was close behind her, "just see how dull his eyes are, Nurse, and his nose is as hot as fire. Poor old dear, it's a shame to turn you out again when you have made yourself so comfortable, but I dare not let you stay. Come, Thug, old man, get up, don't be so lazy. Come, get up, old fellow," and she pushed the animal's sides with the intention of urging him to rise. But Thug, usually so lively, seemed this night to be either very indolent or very sulky. His heavy eyes followed the light of the candle which she carried, in a remarkable manner; but he showed

no other sign of recognition, although Nelly laid her soft cheek against his forehead in her distress at his obstinacy and apparent illness.

"Aggie!" she exclaimed, "this must not be. Dr. Monkton will return home soon, and must not find Thug here. It will make him so angry. Do go down stairs and beg either Long or John to bring up a chain and collar."

"Lor, my deary, do you know what time it is. It's past two, and they must have been abed long ago. And who will be up to receive the dog in the stables either, at this time in the morning? No one; and it would be unreasonable to expect it. No, Miss Nelly, it's unfortunate as the animal's here again, but it's just part and parcel of Master Robert's tricks, and as it is so, best let him bide till daylight; very like the doctor won't be home at all till morning, for Mr. Long says as he's gone right into the country, and I'll be stirring the first thing, my dear, and engage to take Thug back to the kennel myself. So the best thing you can do is, to get a wink of sleep, for you must be rarely tired."

And so Nelly—having no better suggestion to make herself—yielded to old Aggie's persuasion; and after a vain endeavour to with-

draw the fluffy mat from beneath Thug's carcase, for which he saluted her, to her amazement, with a low growl, she submitted to being tucked up in her own bed, where, after a while, fatigue overcoming her grief and anxiety, she fell asleep.

## CHAPTER X.

### DR. MONKTON'S REVENGE.

When Dr. Monkton left the house that evening it was with no thought of enmity against his wife. That she should plead for the restoration of her favourite's liberty, and try to find excuses for her brother's misconduct, was but natural; and however little sympathy her husband felt in her distress, he could not, in common justice, be angry with her for it. But with regard to Robert Brooke, he entertained very different feelings, and, as he told Nelly, had fully made up his mind to speak to him with decision. The fact being that he had never really contemplated his brother-in-law taking up a permanent residence in his house. It had been very convenient to tell his wife so in the days of his courtship, when any idea to the contrary would have frightened her away from him; but he had known from the commencement that it was a plan which could never be either lasting or success-

ful, and he felt that the time had already come when it should be changed. One of his own proposals at the period of his marriage, (and which, although he but desired it in furtherance of the event now contemplated, had made poor Nelly consider him the most generous of men) had been, that the two thousand pounds left to the twins by their grandfather should be settled upon the brother alone, so that he might feel himself to be independent of his sister. And as Dr. Monkton had agreed to settle double that sum upon his intended wife, Mr. Ray had eagerly assented to the proposition, and thought with Nelly that it was a most satisfactory proof of the doctor's honourable intentions towards them both.

But this very act of generosity now rendered the way clear for the ejection of his brother-in-law.

Robert Brooke could not complain that he was thrust forth helpless and penniless upon the world: he had an income of his own to spend as he thought fit, and the sooner he killed himself with it the better, so Dr. Monkton inwardly decided. He was weary of the continued opposition shewn to his wishes by his wife's brother; weary of hearing the tales repeated against him by Mrs. Prowse, and of

the discredit he was bringing upon his name and establishment by repeated acts of folly and drunkenness.

He felt no disposition to remonstrate and argue with him as Nelly had entreated him to do: had he done so, and thereby worked a change, he would have regretted his forbearance; for he was sick of Robert Brooke, and only wanted to get rid of him altogether. He thought that his wife would be more his own when her brother was out of the way; that she would be more interested in his affairs, more affectionate towards himself; more submissive, even he acknowledged, she could not be.

What Nelly would feel at the proposed change had no share in his consideration: James Monkton had determined that his house should be freed from the obnoxious presence of his brother-in-law, and had that end been obtainable only by stepping over the dead body of his wife, it would not have caused him to swerve from his purpose.

He had been opposed, and openly rebelled against, and he was set upon having his revenge.

Such were his thoughts as he took his way into the country, by the time he returned more

important matters had driven them from his mind. Dr. Monkton never used his own horses at night, and he almost regretted it on this occasion, as he was jolted homewards for about twelve miles in a hack conveyance, and on a cold, dark, November morning.

Though he had plenty to occupy his mind, for the case to which he had been summoned was an intricate one, and he was very desirous to pull the patient through it, because the family doctor had pronounced such to be hopeless. So there he sat, knitting his dark eyebrows, and ransacking his clever brain for a new expedient, and hardly noticed that it was six o'clock, and the dawn was breaking, until he paid the fare at his own portals.

Early as it was, however, the attentive Long heard his master's latchkey in the door, and was up at once, eager to ascertain whether he would take a cup of coffee, or wait until he had obtained an hour's rest. But the doctor had already been drenched with hot coffee at the house from which he had come, and declined to take any refreshment except sleep, with which intention he set his foot upon the staircase, closely followed by his attendant.

But as he reached the landing, he started back with an abruptness which nearly sent

Long down the stairs again. The lamp which usually burned all night upon the corridor was out, but the grey morning light streaming through the unshuttered window, and the candle carried by the servant, were quite sufficient to reveal the burly carcase of the mastiff, Thug, stretched out upon the fluffy sheepskin mat, passive, though awake.

"Whose work is this?" said Dr. Monkton, turning to the man behind him.

He did not speak loudly, nor (apparently) angrily; but with a look in his eyes, and an expression about his mouth, which Long had seen before and learned to dread. For his own part, the servant had till then, totally forgotten the occurrence of the past night, and although, being a good-natured fellow, he was usually ready to hide the foibles of Robert Brooke as much as possible from his master's notice, he was too much afraid of the consequences on the present occasion not to lay the blame where it was due.

"Whose work is this?" repeated Dr. Monkton; "by whose order was that dog brought back into the house?"

"By no one's, sir, that I am aware of," replied Long, "he followed Mr. Brooke when he returned home last night, and though John

and me tried all we could to persuade him to let us take the animal back to the stables, the young gentleman didn't seem inclined to it, and so the dog stayed here. I did all I could, I assure you, sir," he repeated, observing the ominous look which was creeping over his master's face, "I told Mr. Brooke that I knew 'twould be against your wishes, and my mistress, she told him the same, sir, but it was all of no use."

"At what time did this occur?"

"At twelve, sir, or thereabouts."

"And your mistress was up at that hour?"

At this question, poor Long, who fancied he was about to drag Nelly into the scrape as well, stammered more than was needful.

"I don't know as she was rightly 'up,' sir; I didn't see my mistress, but she spoke to Mr. Brooke from her dressing-room."

"Go down to the stables, and fetch me a chain and collar."

At this order, portentous from its very brevity, Long disappeared as quickly as he could, and after the necessary delay returned with the articles requested, accompanied by his fellow-labourer, John.

Dr. Monkton, instead of being in his room, was still standing on the landing, gazing

moodily upon the mastiff, who appeared to return the gaze with interest from his red, sleepless eyes.

"Put it on," he said, referring to the chain and collar, as the men reached his side. Neither of them seemed to relish the command, but the footman, being most accustomed to the dog, was brave enough to attempt its fulfilment. But as he stooped towards the animal's throat, Thug quietly raised his head, and displayed all his fangs, at which John started up rather more quickly than he had knelt down.

"Stand back!" said Long, "and let me try —you don't go the right way about it, John," and taking the collar from the other's hand, he approached the mastiff with a word of encouragement. "Come now, old fellow! there —there—gently—that's right!" but just as he had said "that's right," and laid his hand upon him, Thug gave a growl, which might have warned a braver man to be more prudent, and sent Mr. Long against the opposite wall with as much, if not greater agility, than had been previously exhibited by John.

"Why don't you collar the brute?" demanded the doctor, getting impatient at the delay.

"Well, sir, 'tisn't such an easy matter," replied Long, ruefully; "he's been told to lie there, you see, and I expect no one will be able to move him, except 'tis his master or mistress. He's a rare 'un to obey, *I* know! And I shouldn't like to get a bite from him no more than any other would."

"*Bite!*" exclaimed the doctor, contemptuously, "why, he's as gentle as a lamb! However, if you're afraid of that, I'll muzzle him," and walking into his dressing-room, he presently returned with a strap muzzle.

Apparently anxious to show his men what he thought of their pusillanimous fears, Dr. Monkton disdained to make use of any coaxing or persuasion towards the mastiff, but silently approaching him with the muzzle in his hand, deliberately knelt down in order to apply it. But Thug was not the inoffensive lamb-like creature he had described him to be. He had not forgotten the thrashing so lately received from the same hand which now attempted to strap together his powerful jaws, and before the doctor had had time to perceive his danger or to regard the warning cry with which the servants saluted him, the dog, half rising from his recumbent position, had seized and bitten him through the fingers, and but

for a timely retreat, had next attacked his throat. For even as Long and the footman, alarmed for their master's safety, forcibly dragged him beyond the animal's immediate reach, Thug, with a low, strange sound, which was neither a bark, a growl, nor a moan, darted forwards, and with the evident intention of springing, fixed his glaring, angry eyes upon the doctor's form. But, before the men were able to do more than contemplate the threatened horror, the dog had sunk back again upon the sheepskin mat, as though exhausted by the effort he had made.

But neither the suddenness of the animal's attack, the danger, nor the alarm of his companions, had any power to divert Dr. Monkton's attention from a resolution instantaneously but irrevocably formed.

He turned away from all the eager enquiries and persuasions of his servants, to issue one command—

"Bring me my gun!"

But even Long's fears for his own safety gave way before the strangeness of such a request.

"Here, sir? what in the house?" he exclaimed.

"Bring me my gun!" was the only answer

he received, given in a tone of determination, which could neither be mistaken nor disobeyed.

Meanwhile Thug's strange, low cry, which had not had the power to stir Bertie from his torpid slumbers, had fully roused his poor little mistress.

Nelly had gone to sleep, dreading each moment to hear her husband's step upon the stairs; and as is usual in such cases, her rest had been so broken and disturbed that as soon as the dog's howl sounded in her ear, she started up, fully awake, believing he had come. And there she lay, listening to the subdued voices on the landing, wondering whose they were, and what they could portend, and yet not daring at first to do more than listen to them.

Long, keeping a good watch upon the dreaded animal the while, found his way into the dressing-room, and procuring the gun, delivered it into his master's hand. It was always kept loaded—in another moment it was on full cock, and with his finger on the trigger, and a look of malicious pleasure on his face, Dr. Monkton cautiously advanced towards the prostrate mastiff.

Poor Thug seemed to know what was in store for him. He made no further effort in

his own defence, but merely shut his eyes, and shivered, as the barrel of the gun touched his ear, and the contents were discharged into his brain.

Such a report was sufficient to arouse and alarm every inmate of the house, however soundly they may have been sleeping.

A scream from one side of the corridor, and a shout followed by an oath from the other, announced that the two persons most interested in the mastiff's fate, would soon appear to learn it for themselves; but that fact did not seem to affect the perpetrator of the deed further than by apprising him that it would be as well if the two men-servants were first removed from the scene of action.

"Take this down with you," he said, carelessly, as he delivered his gun to Long, "and draw the other charge. It has been loaded for such a time that it is quite a chance it did not miss fire;" and then as the men retreated, leaving the dead body of the mastiff upon the landing, and the door of his wife's dressing-room was flung open, he turned quite as coolly to confront the scared face, and trembling figure of poor Nelly.

"Oh! James!" she exclaimed, "what has happened, what have you done?" and then her

quick eyes roving to where the form of Thug lay outstretched upon the sheepskin mat stained with his blood, she flew across the corridor, and flung herself down by his side.

"Oh! have you killed my dog? How cruel! how unjust! My poor dog—whom I loved so much, and who never did you any harm. Oh! how could you be so cruel—so very *very* cruel? Oh! Thug—my poor Thug—how I used to love you!" and in a burst of grief she hid her face on the dead creature's body, and wept passionately.

"Yes! I have killed him, Helena!" interposed the cold, modulated tones of her husband's voice, "as I should kill any animal who is turned into a nuisance for my annoyance. But you need not look so indignantly at me about it. If you have any one to thank for this occurrence it is your brother. He is the murderer of your dog—not myself."

"*I* am?" exclaimed a voice on the other side of them, where Bertie, sobered by his night's rest, appeared, at the door of his own room. "What do you mean by saying so?—What have *I* had to do with it?"

"Everything!" returned the doctor, "but your day is over, Robert Brooke. Your follies, as far as they concern our peace, die with your sister's dog."

## CHAPTER XI.

### NELLY AND BERTIE ARE PARTED.

"By what right," exclaimed Bertie, in tones the haughtiness of which, had her attention not been absorbed by grief for her slaughtered favourite, would not have failed to excite the alarm of his sister, "By what right," he repeated, advancing to the centre of the landing, and confronting his brother-in-law, "do you first destroy property which does not belong to you, and then tax me with being the cause of your violence. I shall be obliged if you will explain yourself."

"I fully intend to do so," replied Dr. Monkton as he slowly and methodically wound a handkerchief about the fingers which bore traces of poor Thug's farewell. "In the first place, the animal was mine to do as I chose with. He belonged to my wife, and our possessions are in common—he proved himself dangerous, and I am perfectly justified in putting him out of the way. In the

second, had you left him in the kennel, where I had given orders he should abide, he would probably have been alive at this moment. By bringing him here, your sister has, as I told her before, only yourself to thank for his death."

"That is a paltry excuse," said Robert Brooke in return, "the dog was ours, and you knew and acknowledged it."

"Paltry or not, it must stand," replied the doctor, "as I intend to make no other. But it is time that this sort of thing was put a stop to. You have now been a guest in my house for many months, and the long and the short of it is, Robert Brooke, that you have outstayed your welcome. If we are not to quarrel irrevocably, we must part."

At these words Nelly started from her kneeling position and leant against the balustrades, gazing from one man to the other with wide staring eyes.

"A guest?" said Robert Brooke with heightened colour, and in a tone of interrogation.

"Yes, a guest, most certainly," repeated the doctor with the utmost nonchalance. "You did not suppose I intended to charge you for your board and lodging, did you?

That is not my way of treating the friends who honour me by staying beneath my roof."

"It was not as a *guest* that you spoke of my living with you when we were at Little Bickton," said the other in a trembling voice.

"Did I not?" was the careless reply. "If so, the reason was, perhaps, because I hoped at that time that your visits here would be so frequent and prolonged, that you would come at last to look upon Hilstone almost in the light of a home. But such an idea, as you must perceive, would be preposterous now. You dislike the place, you refuse to conform to the rules of this establishment, or to recognise the master of it, in myself; added to which your habits are such as to render you quite unfit to be the associate of your sister. There are several other reasons, unnecessary for me to particularise, which render it desirable that your visit to us should, at all events, for the present, be—what shall I call it?" he continued, smiling,—"I can hardly say—curtailed, considering the time it has already lasted;—well, terminated then, or let us say, postponed until a more favourable opportunity. You have your own money, you know; a sufficiency for

your maintenance has been settled on you, therefore you can have no excuse to make, or, as far as I can see, complaint."

"I have no wish or intention of making either," replied Robert Brooke, who had nevertheless turned very pale at the prospect of parting with his sister, "but if I leave your house, I leave it for ever. Do you imagine I would stay to be a pensioner on your bounty; or to run the risk of being again insulted as you have insulted me this morning? No! you may force me to go, if you choose, but you will never see me again if you do."

"Bertie! Bertie! for Heaven's sake think what you are saying," cried Nelly as she darted across the landing, and seized her brother's hand. He turned, and with quivering lips and a face which was ashen-grey regarded her fondly.

"I know what I am saying, Nell, well enough; and I have one regret in saying it—yourself!"

"In that respect you must, of course, act as you see fit," replied Dr. Monkton. "It makes no alteration in what I said to you, or think concerning you. You appear to me to have made a slight mistake respecting the intentions I entertained on your behalf, pre-

vious to my marriage, but if so, it is rectified now, and not likely to occur again."

"A slight mistake!" shouted Robert Brooke, without heeding the warning pressure of his sister's hand. "You know, Monkton, that it was not a mistake. You know that before my sister consented to marry you, you not only told her that your house should be my home, but held out hopes of my restoration to health, which you have not even attempted to fulfil. Nell thought, I know she did—as I was fool enough to think too—that you were almost as interested in myself as she is; and that her marriage was to secure me every comfort for life; else, why is she here, poor child? why is she here?"

"You are not paying a high compliment to my powers of pleasing," remarked Dr. Monkton in reply. "I trust that Helena had other inducements to become my wife beside the very futile hope of seeing a miracle performed in your behalf. If I slightly flattered her desires with respect to yourself at that period, it was only what any other man in the same situation would have done; and you, at any rate, might have been considered sober enough to calculate the chances of your cure. But you have been blinded by selfishness to

everything but what should further your own good."

"How can you stand there and disclaim your own words? Did you not propose trying all kinds of devices for the strengthening of my spine? Chemical baths, and galvanism, and shampooing, and mechanical supports? Where are all the fine remedies which were to afford me relief? Which of them has been tried? which, even procured? No! you cannot deny that you lured us here under false pretences; and that you have not fulfilled one of the promises you made!"

Dr. Monkton smiled at the infuriated youth with contemptuous pity.

"I believe I have heard you use exactly the same expression, Robert, with regard to your cousin Nigel Brooke. He lured your sister to the Chase, did he not? under false pretences; and offered you his assistance doubtless, with a similar design. All the world is against you, except yourself. That fact is evident."

"Do you wish to madden me?" exclaimed Bertie as he shook off Nelly's clinging grasp and advanced to his brother-in-law, "your pretence with respect to your feeling for Nigel Brooke, is another of the vile deceptions for

which, were I not cursed with this impotency, I would strike you to the ground."

"Softly, softly!" sarcastically urged Dr. Monkton, holding up a hand as though to defend himself, "you frighten me, Robert, with your threats. But, whilst we are on the subject of deception, I have a word to say to yourself. I think we may cry quits there. What about the deception that, had it lain with yourself, would have been practised upon me with regard to my wife?"

At this question, Nelly (who, though too terrified to interfere, was watching the progress of the quarrel in the most agonising suspense) saw the same strange, grey shade steal over her brother's face, which had so much startled her once before, when her husband made a similar accusation against him at the luncheon-table.

"Deception!" he stammered, but with the desperation of one who feels that the betrayal of an important secret is close at hand, "what deception?"

"You know as well as I do," replied Dr. Monkton, sternly, "but since you force an explanation from me, be it so. That, by which you would have concealed from me the truth concerning your parentage, and led me to be-

lieve that I was about to take a wife of honourable birth."

"And can you prove otherwise," said Robert Brooke, with a final endeavour at concealment.

"Of course I can. Your guardian, being a gentleman, revealed every particular to me, as you, had you been a man, might have guessed he would do."

"And pray what had he to reveal?" persevered his opponent, although the question was but a gasping whisper.

"That you are—bastards!"

"*Coward!*" exclaimed Robert Brooke, as he staggered back against the opposite wall.

"Bertie! Bertie! it is not true," screamed Nelly, as she again flew to her brother's side, "say it is not true. Tell him it is a lie, it is a mistake. Mr. Ray must have been mistaken; we were poor, darling, and uneducated, and very humble in our way of living, but we are not that—oh! say we are not that!" and she sunk down sobbing, with her arms clasped about his knees.

Old Aggie, who was the only one of the servants who had dared to appear upon the scene (although the others had taken care to station themselves within a convenient distance for hearing) now came forward and tried

to disengage Nelly from her brother, for the latter, leaning back against the door-post, seemed almost as if he were about to faint.

"Come, Miss Nelly; come, my darling," said the old nurse, coaxingly. "Let Master Robert bide a bit, for all this will be too much for him. Don't you take on so, dearie, for let people say what they will, your own lives have been honourable, and no one can't deny it."

"No! no! Nurse," exclaimed the girl, resisting all Aggie's efforts to raise her, "let me alone, don't touch me, until Bertie has given me an answer. Brother! darling! my own brother! tell me, for God's sake, that it isn't true! that we are not what—what *he*—called us; and I will go away at once, and try to be contented."

"I *can't*, Nelly," said Bertie, panting with excitement. "I *can't*, darling, or I would, but it is true—true as *he* is false! I have kept it from you, dear, I thought it best, but I have had my reward, in hearing you first learn it from *his* lips. We are all that he has said, nameless, forsaken, and obscure, and I wish to God I had been content that we should remain so."

"But we are still the same," cried Nelly,

rising to her feet and folding her brother in her arms, "we are still own brother and sister, Bertie, no shame can unmake us that. Let us go away together, darling, let us go where no one will care to throw our misfortune in our face; or where, happy in each other's love, we can afford to laugh at them, even though they should. We want no grand houses nor fine clothes, nor carriages, to make us happy, Bertie, we only want each other; and what should separate us, born in the same hour, and to the same heritage of shame. Come, darling, let us go; in a few days, or weeks, or months, we shall have forgotten all this misery, and you shall never want whilst I can work for you." And in the energy of her devoted love, Nelly was really urging her brother towards the head of the staircase, as though they could leave the house then and there, and never re-enter it. But she was soon recalled to a sense of her position.

"Pardon me, Helena," said the calm voice of her husband, "but you seem to have forgotten that you are no longer a free agent. That your brother, after his violent language and expressed determination, quits our roof, is unavoidable; but I must beg you to remember that you are my wife, and that your

place is *here*, where your duty lies, and your implicit obedience is due."

At this reminder, Nelly's arms relaxed their grasp of her brother, and she sunk down wearily by his side.

"Oh, let me go!" she said, looking up at her husband with a white, worn face, "let me go with him, James; I shall die if you keep me here. We are both the same, you know, if he is a disgrace to you, so am I; let me go away with him, and we will never trouble you by word or look again."

"Go away with him," replied James Monkton, angrily, "what folly are you talking? *How* could you go away with him, even if I wished it, without creating a scandal which should raise the town? Your brother leaving us, after so long a visit, is only natural, and easily accounted for; but do you imagine that I intend our private affairs to become the comment of Hilstone? You are a perfect child, Helena. Get up from that absurd position; and if you cannot better control your feelings and your words, go into your bedroom until you are more calm. You will let every servant in the house know the reason of our disagreement. It is most unreasonable of you, most ill-judged."

She rose as passively as she had sunk down, and stood by the side of her brother, trembling.

"Poor child," said Bertie, as he touched her cold lips with his own. "I have sold you for very little, indeed. I made a bad bargain of you, Nell; and if you ever forgive me, it is more than I shall do myself."

"Mr. Brooke," interposed Dr. Monkton, "if you intend to stand there much longer, insulting me by your reminiscences and your regrets, you will reduce me to the unpleasant necessity of sending for a fly to remove yourself and your possessions from my house. The matter is settled, that we part, and the sooner it takes place the better."

"I am entirely of your opinion," returned the other, "Aggie, pack up my things and tell one of the servants to fetch a cab."

The "things," consisting only of his clothes, did not take long to pack, and by the time he had exchanged his dressing-gown for his ordinary attire, they were strapped down and ready for travelling. Meanwhile Dr. Monkton had retired to his own room, and Nelly, passive from sheer despair, sat beside old Aggie, with folded hands, gazing dreamily at each article as she placed it in the portmanteau; but when

the arrangements were complete, and the rattling wheels of a hack conveyance had stopped before the door, and Bertie, tearless, and as despairing as herself, came towards her with the intention of saying farewell, all Nelly's passiveness passed away, and she gave a shriek which resounded throughout the house, and brought Dr. Monkton from his dressing-room again, upon the landing.

"Good-bye!" she screamed. "Oh! no, Bertie! not good-bye! I can't say it! I couldn't say it! I should die. Let me go with you, brother! Let me go with him, James! Don't keep me here to die all by myself. Oh! Bertie, oh! my darling, kill me before you go away and leave me all alone."

She clung to him, she grasped him with a force and energy which rendered it difficult even for Dr. Monkton to disengage her, and utterly impossible for Bertie to free himself.

"It *must* be, Nelly, there is no hope, no chance of an alternative. Be brave, darling, be good; think how often you have been so before for my sake, and try it once again, if you don't wish this parting to prove my death. It is like death already! It is worse than death."

And then, as he tore himself from her, and

gained the head of the staircase, he turned and said:

"Nelly, for the first time I seem to see all your unselfishness and your love. This is my own fault, I might have prevented it had I chosen; but what has your life been, but one long thought of me? God bless you for it!"

But she could not let him go. She shook off her husband's hold, as though she had equalled him in strength, and flew after her brother.

"Bertie! only one word! I *am* good you see, I *am* brave! I will not distress you more than I can help; but where are you going, darling? where am I to find you when I come?"

The possibility of not following him was incredible to her.

"I can't say, Nelly, but I think to London. Anyway, you shall hear, of course you shall hear from me every day and every hour. I shall have no pleasure except in writing to you."

"But Aggie must go with you," she replied. "Oh, where is Aggie; she must make herself ready at once," and flying after the old woman, who had retreated weeping to her room, Nelly came upon her with the startling announcement:

"Nurse! what are you about? Bertie is

going directly, and of course you must go with him. How could he get on without either of us ?"

"Lor! my deary," exclaimed old Aggie, terribly fluttered by the sudden command, "however can I get ready to go along of Master Robert now? I haven't a rag put up, Miss Nelly, and ever so many trifles owing in the town. 'Tis morally impossible, my dear, as I can accompany your brother to-day; to-morrow or next day I could follow him, perhaps, if yourself and the doctor see fit, but to go along of him now—"

"It must be *now*, Aggie! you must go with him directly," replied her mistress, decidedly, "or I will never speak or look at you again. Oh!" altering her tone to one of supplication, "think what I am suffering, and put on your things at once. On my knees, dear old nurse, I beg and pray of you to do as I ask. Never mind your boxes or your bills, they shall be sent after you, and paid; I will see to all that, only get ready, that Bertie may not go alone."

And then, as the poor old woman, scarcely knowing, between her love for Nelly and her grief at the turn things had taken, what she was about, began to array herself in her bonnet

and shawl, the girl drew a purse from her bosom, and thrust it into her hand.

"See here, Aggie! I snatched this from my dressing-table as I passed. I don't know how much there is in it, but it is all mine; keep it, and use it for Bertie and yourself, and in the pocket," she added, blushing, "there is a card, a card which Cousin Nigel gave me, with his address in town. If Bertie should go to London, Nurse, promise me that you will find out Mr. Brooke, and let him know that he is there, and that I am miserable: that is all."

She seized the old woman's withered face between her hands, and kissed it affectionately.

"God bless you, dear old Nurse! Take care of him, be gentle with him, love him for my sake; you are all the hope I have in parting with him."

Then she returned to the landing, and spoke almost as rapidly to Bertie.

"She is coming, dearest, she will not be a minute. Say you will wait for her, or you will break my heart."

"Well! I will wait a minute!" he replied, "but it must not be more, for each extra minute in this house is an hour of my life," and then perceiving a furtive smile upon the face of his

brother-in-law, Robert Brooke turned to him and said :

" Aye ! you may laugh, Monkton, but that does not alter either the truth or the meaning of my words. You have insulted me to-day as you would never have dared to do had I been able to resent it like another man. You think, I daresay, with the body of that poor mastiff lying dead at your feet, and the carriage waiting at the door to convey me from this house, that you have gained the victory, and as far as I am concerned, perhaps you have ; but there is a God in Heaven, Monkton, and as you treat that girl, whom you bought with promises which you have never fulfilled, so will I pray that He may remember you. You have acted the part of a coward towards me this day, but beware how you act in the same manner towards my sister, for she has an Advocate and Protector of whom I am not worthy to boast."

" All very fine talking," sneered Dr. Monkton, who had nevertheless considerably changed countenance at this address, " but I think we have had almost enough of it for once, Mr. Brooke, and I am afraid you will find that it will not advance your own interests, for with

my consent, your sister holds no further communication with you from to-day."

At the announcement of this fresh trouble, Nelly, who had been leaning over the balustrades, eagerly drinking in the last sounds of her brother's voice, and gazing at his retreating figure with sad, wild eyes, turned and stared into her husband's face as if she were bewildered.

"It is true, Helena!" he said, in answer to her imploring gaze, "if your own feelings do not prompt you to abstain from associating with one who has so grossly insulted myself, I shall be compelled to adopt means by which you will be effectually prevented doing so."

Then, as Bertie, without further remonstrance, descended the remainder of the flight of stairs, and she heard the vehicle which was conveying Aggie and himself to the station, drive rapidly away, Nelly fell down, like a stone, where her husband's cruel words had smitten her, across the lifeless body of her favourite Thug.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE PROPHECIES OF MRS. PROWSE ARE NOT VERIFIED.

Love that is reared upon no better foundation than passion can never last. It is like making a bonfire of paper or shavings, without more solid fuel, which, however much they may crackle and splutter on being lighted, will eventually die out, and leave nothing but blackness behind. And how can it be otherwise whilst we are creatures of change? A few days or weeks, at the most a few months, are sufficient to render us familiar with each line in a picture, each word in a poem, each note in a melody, and then, however they enchanted us at first, we tire of them, regard them no more than if we had never seen or heard them, and begin to look around us for something new; and, were it possible to treat the man or woman of whom we have become weary, like a painting or a book, to let them hang on our walls without further notice, or

lie, covered with dust, upon our bookshelves, whilst we run about in search of novelties, marriage for the sake of a pleasing face or an engaging manner might not be attended with the heavy risk which it is now.

But we know that it is otherwise. We know that when we have become so accustomed to the perfect features, or the graceful figure, that they attract us no more than the homeliest would do, if there is no fresh ever-varying mind, welling over with new thoughts, new ideas, new feelings, to engage our attention and fall back upon, we get as sick of the enforced companionship as if we were compelled to read the same vapid composition over and over again, from beginning to end.

Dr. Monkton need not have proved this to be the case with his wife had he so chosen.

With all her ignorance and simplicity, Nelly had a fund of original matter on which he might have drawn, and found his trouble well repaid him. She had plenty of common sense and a hardy vigorous mind, which would have delighted in being taught and thought no trouble too great which should advance that end. And she possessed what was still better, a quick comprehension to fasten eagerly on any subject to which his superior intellect

had guided it, combined with a humble opinion of herself, and an earnest desire to learn. But of what value or interest were these mental qualities to James Monkton? He had married the girl for her pretty face and naïve manner, and he had not even stopped to inquire if she possessed any other qualifications for becoming his life-companion.

Since their marriage he had seen her at breakfast, and luncheon, and dinner, and now and then he had spent an evening in her company. If Nelly were becomingly dressed on those occasions, appeared cheerful and good-tempered, and not averse to receiving his caresses, her husband was perfectly satisfied, for his life was lived apart from hers or any woman's.

He was absorbed in his professional pursuits, and had his wife gone on smiling and contented, and otherwise conducting herself unobnoxiously, he would probably have remained as satisfied with her until the end.

But as soon as any occasion for annoyance arose between them; as soon as the poor girl either directly or indirectly became a cause of offence to him, the worth of his professed attachment became apparent.

As he raised her senseless body from the

spot where it had fallen, and thought that this separation from her brother might prove but the commencement of a train of evils with herself, Dr. Monkton was almost sorry he had married her. The long dark lashes which lay upon her cheeks had no attractions for him at that moment. The white teeth gleaming through her parted lips, the curved mouth, the broad fair forehead, what were they to him then? Only part and parcel of a woman who had not sufficient strength of mind to control her feelings, and evidently intended to make a nuisance of herself. As he carried her across the landing to her own room, he did not notice one of the beauties over which a few months before he had fallen into raptures. As he laid her on her bed and stood by until she had regained her consciousness, he did not even kiss the face which he had considered, so short a time ago, to be the most engaging in the world. Yet Dr. Monkton's feelings were not singular. In this respect he was like most of his fellow creatures to whom possession means satiety. But had he loved Nelly as he should have loved his wife; had her physical attractions been a secondary consideration to him, compared to her heart and soul, he would have felt her to

be dearer in an hour of such helplessness than she had ever appeared in the flush and pride of beauty. As it was, however, as soon as he perceived that she had recovered from her swoon, he rang the bell for the housemaid, and delivering her mistress to her charge, retired to his own room.

When he emerged thence an hour afterwards the house seemed quite changed. It really looked cheerful again. The morning sun, bright for the time of year, was streaming over the corridor from which the dead body of the mastiff, together with the mat he died on, had been carefully removed; and in the rooms which had been occupied by Robert Brooke, women were laughing and chatting with each other as they shook up the bolsters and mattresses, and piled all the furniture together, preparatory to a thorough clearing. The doctor attired with his usual care; his glossy hair and whiskers scrupulously attended to, and holding a scented cambric handkerchief in his hand, stepped lightly across the landing to the apartment of his wife:

"I am going down to breakfast, Helena!" he said, with affected animation. "Shall I send yours up here?"

She was lying just as he had left her, pas-

sively stretched upon the bed with her languid eyes fixed upon the patch of sky which she could distinguish through the window-pane.

"You will take something to eat, will you not?" he repeated, thinking she had not heard his words.

But she never answered him, and only shuddered when he laid his hand upon her shoulder. So he turned away, resolving in his mind that she was sulky, and bid the woman in attendance follow him, to carry up the breakfast tray.

He did not suffer the incidents of the morning to destroy his own appetite, however; on the contrary, it was, if anything, better than usual. The house was clear of two of its greatest nuisances: Robert Brooke was gone, and the mastiff was dead; even the atmosphere seemed brighter and lighter in consequence; and Dr. Monkton felt as though he were going to begin life anew. So he attacked the various dishes before him with considerable relish, and was detected humming to himself as he entered his consulting-room; an occurrence so unprecedented, that Long remarked in confidence to John, that he shouldn't wonder now if he heard that the

world itself was coming to an end. But though Dr. Monkton was so light-hearted and content, he did not feel easy when, two hours afterwards, Elizabeth the housemaid asked to see him before he left home, to communicate the fact that her mistress had neither moved nor spoke since he had seen her last. He was not sure what termination this unusual calmness might not have, and did not like to leave Nelly alone with the servants. So he despatched a message to request the presence of his sister, and in a few minutes more, Mrs. Prowse bustled into his apartments.

"My dear James!" she commenced, "is not this news too good to be true? Are they really both of them gone—that most unpleasant young man, and that odious dog? I could scarcely believe my ears when Long told me of it! What a deliverance! I declare the place looks quite different without them already. But how did it all come about? I am dying to hear."

"Very naturally!" replied her brother. "The mastiff showed himself to be dangerously inclined, and so I shot him, as I should have done either of my own animals under the same circumstances; however, Brooke

chose to resent the act as a butchery, and we came to words about it, which ended in his leaving for London; which after all, you know, is not to be wondered at, for his visit here has extended over four months already, and I rather think he wanted an excuse for a change himself. Hilstone is not a lively place for a young man."

Dr. Monkton mentioned the occurrence in this offhand manner because his sister was a great gossip, and he had no desire for his family quarrels to become patent to the town; but even whilst he spoke he felt she was aware that his words were not the expression of his real feelings.

"Well! perhaps not," returned Mrs. Prowse, willing to humour him, although she knew that this event was what he had been trying to bring about for weeks past, "but it is just as well it has happened so. Guests should not outstay their welcome, and this is not the best time of the year in which to visit Hilstone. But what have you done to your hand?"

"Oh! that was a last piece of attention on Thug's part," replied the doctor smiling, as he regarded the long white fingers which he had daintily patched with court plaister; "he

seized and bit me here as I was about to muzzle him."

"The nasty dangerous brute!" exclaimed his sister, "how thankful I am that you destroyed him. But I hope the wounds won't be troublesome—are they deep?"

"Oh, dear no!" replied the doctor, indifferently; "they are nothing—mere scratches—only they look unsightly. But why I sent for you, Matilda, was to ask if you would be troubled to sit by Helena during my absence. I shall not be gone long."

"To be sure, if you wish it, James; though I can't say that she usually appears to desire my company. But what's the matter with her—is she ill?"

"Not ill, perhaps—but considerably upset by all this annoyance. She is on her bed, at present, but I think it would be a kindness if you could persuade her to dress and come downstairs. She evidently feels the separation from her brother!"

"*Feels* it! my dear James! Of course she *feels* it! but that is not the slightest excuse for neglecting her household duties. I should like to know when you have known *me* to lie in bed on account of my feelings, or any such rubbish."

"There is no doubt that they are attached to one another!" remarked Dr. Monkton, as he put his papers together, preparatory for a start.

"And so are we, I trust; and so are most brothers and sisters: but that is no reason that they should never be separated. And how your wife could ever have expected anything else is my wonder. There are few people who would have kept that young man here as long as you have with his nasty dissipated habits, and his impertinent manner. I am sure if she thinks rightly, she should consider it quite a blessing that he has left the house. *I* should if he in any way belonged to me."

"Well! don't say anything to Helena, about his not coming back again; at all events, to-day: because I fancy it is that idea which is worrying her most. And of course he *will* come back, sooner or later—there is little doubt about that!"

This speech of the doctor's, again intended to mislead his sister, did its work as effectually as its predecessor.

"To be sure not!" she replied, "only I *do* hope that you will not be so foolish as to give him up the guest-chamber again. It has gone to my heart to see how all that beautiful fur-

niture has been tossed and tumbled about for his convenience; and I am sure it will take months to sweeten those rooms sufficiently for the use of any decent person. Bachelors have always been put upon the upper story before, and I can't see why Mr. Brooke is to be treated differently to everybody else."

"Well, well," interrupted the doctor, who considered the discussion a sad waste of time, "it will be soon enough to talk about that when Robert Brooke returns to Hilstone. Meanwhile my patients are waiting for me, and I want you to go and look after my wife."

"Oh! of course, my dear James, I will run up at once, and you will see Helena at the luncheon table—you may depend upon that! Indeed I shall *insist* upon her rising; and if I find she is at all low, I will take her round to the Deanery with me, to-night. Mrs. Filmer begged me to step in after dinner; and, in fact, James," lowering her voice, "I prophesy that you will find Helena altogether a different creature now her brother is gone. His influence was the very worst to which she could be subjected, and now that it is removed, if you will leave her to dear Mrs. Filmer and myself for a few weeks, we shall shew you quite another young lady at the close of them."

This notion, which coincided with his own ideas of the change which separation from her brother might effect in Nelly, pleased Dr. Monkton, and he left Mrs. Prowse to pursue her system of education, as cheerfully as though no blight had fallen on the life of his young wife.

The first thing which his sister did upon his departure, was to whisk upstairs, and knock sharply at the door of Nelly's room, which, after a short delay, was opened by Elizabeth.

"Dear me! Elizabeth!" exclaimed the canon's wife; "why didn't you open the door before? What are you all about up here? why, Mrs. James!" going up to the silent figure on the bed; "you don't mean to tell me you have not yet risen—do you know what time it is?—past twelve o'clock, and such a genial morning. I've been all round the town before this, about some commissions, for dear Mrs. Filmer.—Why, what's the matter with you—are you ill? are you in any pain—or are you only lazy?"

At this tirade which was jerked out in Mrs. Prowse's shrillest voice and quickest manner, Nelly just raised her languid eyes for a moment, and then, the heavy lids drooped again, and she turned away from the speaker.

"If you please, ma'am, I don't think my mistress *is* well," interposed the housemaid; "for I can't get her to drink her tea, nor eat any breakfast; and she's been lying just that way, without stirring or speaking, ever since I was called to her by the Doctor."

"But surely she can speak to *me*, if she can do nothing else. So, I hear your brother's gone to London, Mrs. James—he has a nice day for travelling, has he not—and he'll find town much gayer than Hilstone. I'm afraid our style of life was rather too quiet to suit his tastes. Eh, Mrs. James?"

At this allusion to Bertie, Nelly gave a deep sigh, and half raising her head from her pillow, stared about her as though just aroused from sleep.

"And the dog, too!" continued Mrs. Prowse, following up her advantage, "so he's gone into the bargain. Quite a clearance, isn't it? Well! I never was partial to the animal, as you know, and always considered him most unfit for a lady's pet, but still I am sorry it was necessary to destroy the poor creature, because he would have made a fine watch-dog, which was his proper vocation, and yet after all, perhaps it is as well, for of course

my brother is the best judge of what was necessary to be done ?"

"Oh ! it was *not* necessary—it was not at *all* necessary ;" cried Nelly, in a voice of pain, as the rattling talk of her sister-in-law recalled her trouble vividly to her mind : "my poor dog ! my dear old dog ! pray don't speak of it—don't mention it again—I cannot bear it !" and she turned her face upon her pillow, and commenced to weep.

"Oh ! well !" exclaimed Mrs. Prowse, testily, "if the mere mention of the animal is to give offence, of course we had better avoid it. But surely the death of a dog, Mrs. James—of a dangerous, vicious dog, which was ready to attack everybody who approached him, is not to be permitted to keep you in this state of inaction, whilst your duties as the mistress of my brother's establishment are being neglected. It would be far more becoming, I think, considering what is required, were you to rise and look after your household matters instead of lying here, crying for what cannot be helped. One would think, to see you, that it was a Christian you were lamenting, instead of a brute."

Nelly rose from her position at once ; it was better to constrain herself to action than to

stop quietly there, whilst she was being "talked at," by Mrs. Prowse; and her sister-in-law, seeing the good effect already produced by her words, began to credit herself with more discernment than she had dared to hope that she possessed.

"Come, that's right, Mrs. James!" she said with an air of patronage, "you must dress and come down stairs, and make a good luncheon, and then you will feel yourself again. Your brother's gone to have *his* holiday, you know, and so you must make the best use of yours, and enjoy yourself during his absence. Everyone has to part with their friends at times, and of course they feel the change at first; but no woman of good sense would permit her feelings to interfere with the routine of her husband's establishment."

To this speech as before Nelly made no reply, but slowly going through the business of her toilet, permitted the housemaid to robe her first in one garment and then another whilst she sat like a statue to be dressed. When the business was concluded, Mrs. Prowse would have tucked the girl's arm under her own, in a jaunty and affable manner, as if she had determined on the thing and accomplished it, but Nelly drew back

from the proffered assistance, and walked by herself, slowly but steadily. When she came out upon the landing, and her eye fell on the open door of what had been Bertie's room, and the spot where she had last seen the wretched carcase of Thug, she shuddered, but no more, and proceeded down the stairs without glancing at them again. But once in the dining-room, Mrs. Prowse found that her power over her sister-in-law had departed. Nelly seated herself in an arm chair, and with her clasped hands upon her lap, gazed idly out of the window or on the ground. Not all the efforts of the canon's wife could induce her to talk, nor to smile, and when Dr. Monkton joined them at the luncheon-table he found it as impossible to persuade her to eat, indeed more so, for she visibly shrunk from him whenever he addressed or approached her. At dinner it was just the same. Nelly was dressed as carefully as usual, and was as punctual in her attendance at the table; but though she took the different eatables upon her plate, she sent them away untasted; and her answers, if any, were given in monosyllables. So her husband lost his temper in consequence, and relinquished even the attempt to rouse her, and as the only thing

she had done with energy since the morning, was to refuse to be taken to the deanery, she was left in peace by both brother and sister, and permitted to go early to her bed. But the next day it was the same, and the day after that, and for many days in succession. There was no visible alteration in Nelly's manner. She dressed and came down stairs, and presided at meals; gave her orders, and spoke when she was spoken to, but nothing more. Not a smile, not a voluntary communication passed her lips; but she spent all her leisure time with her folded hands before her, gazing out upon the wintry sky, or on the ground, as if she were striving to solve some mystery beyond her comprehension. She did not weep, or if so, no one saw her tears, but every now and then a sigh which seemed to labour up from the deepest recesses of her heart would issue from her lips, and be scarcely lost upon the air before it was followed by another.

And neither did she rest by night, for whenever her husband had the opportunity for observation, he invariably found her lying on her pillows with wide-open sleepless eyes, which only closed with involuntary shrinking as she noticed his approach.

This sort of conduct nettled Dr. Monkton;

he would not believe but that it was assumed for his annoyance, and he began to feel as revengeful towards Nelly as he had done towards her brother. He had not forgotten nor permitted to pass unobserved the allusion which Robert Brooke had made to his sister's object in accepting his proposals; and it was brought back vividly to his recollection by her present behaviour. But he resolved that it should not continue. Over the boy he had possessed no control except by banishing him from his presence, but his wife was his own to do as he chose with, and his firm determination was to break the obstinacy of her spirit by preventing her having any communication with her absent brother until she displayed more cordial feelings towards himself.

Still Mrs. Prowse was more hopeful than was to be expected of her, and continued to affirm that if Nelly were only given over to the tender mercies of Mrs. Filmer and herself, a few weeks' discipline would make a different creature of her.

But after some five or six days of almost lifeless languor, the poor girl seemed suddenly to undergo a change. From being passive she became restless and excited. She began

to watch for the arrival of the daily post, the hours for which might almost have been traced by the feverish flush which gathered on her cheek, as they approached; and the livid pallor which they left as they departed without bringing her a letter from her brother. At this juncture she abandoned that inert position of despair, and took to wandering about the house in an aimless, unsatisfied manner instead, roaming from room to room as though in quest of something which she never found.

And once at night as Dr. Monkton was returning from his business, he was struck by seeing the door of the empty guest-chamber left wide open, and entering to ascertain the cause was startled to see an apparition clothed in white with flowing hair, who swaying backwards and forwards over the forsaken bed, and moaning to herself in sleep, kept praying Bertie to come back again, or she should die. And at that time, too, he heard her couple another name with that of Bertie, and call loudly upon Nigel Brooke to fulfil his oft-repeated promise, and to save her brother.

Yet Nelly never spoke to her husband on the subject. She never mentioned Robert's name, nor communicated her anxiety at

receiving no letter from him, either to the doctor or his sister. She mourned in secret, and suffered by herself until a whole fortnight had gone by since the morning that poor Thug met his death, and yet no news of the traveller had arrived; and no change for the better appeared in Nelly's conduct. Mrs. Prowse's confident prophecies in the benefit which must accrue from a separation between the twins, did not seem in a fair way of being realised.

When, one day, all the girl's apathetic patience at once deserted her. A light seemed suddenly to break upon her mind, and suggesting what so strange a silence might portend, overcame her invincible repugnance to entering upon the subject with her husband. It was as though nature had succumbed, and could bear the strain laid upon it no longer, for with a rapidly-formed resolution she burst one morning into the doctor's own room, and addressed him vehemently in these words:

"James! where is Bertie? where is my brother? why is it that I have never heard from him?"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE BROTHER AND SISTER MEET AGAIN.

THE "gratis" patients had dispersed, and the doctor happened to be alone, jotting down his day's work in his memorandum-book. At the excited questions which burst from his wife, he merely looked up from his occupation and answered coolly :

"How should I know. Am I your brother's keeper?"

He could have satisfied her at that very moment. He could have told her where Bertie was, and what he was about; but had he done so, he would have been robbed of his revenge. Even whilst he marked her dilated eye, round which anxiety and sleeplessness had set dark rings ; and watched the heaving of her breast, he smiled to think that silence and neglect had already driven her so far to his feet.

"But where can he be, what can he be doing?" she continued wildly. "It is now

two whole weeks since he went from here, and I have not had a line to tell me where he may be found. Oh! James! I have been patient, I have been submissive; have I not? If you know where Bertie is, pray tell me, don't keep me longer in suspense!"

But it was Dr. Monkton's turn to triumph now, and he was not slow to avail himself of the opportunity.

"So you have at last thought fit to consult me on the subject," he quietly observed, as he continued pencilling down the various engagements he had made. "Perhaps it would have been better had you decided on doing so before. However, I really don't see of what assistance I can be to you in the matter. Your brother can write, I believe. If he had wished to communicate with you, I suppose he would have done so?"

"Oh, no! that cannot be the reason," she replied, forgetting in her anxiety to resent the coldness of his demeanour. "I am sure he would have written if he could: his last promise to me was to do so. But cannot I find out, is there no means by which I can ascertain where he is living at this moment?"

"What, in London?" returned her husband, laughing at the idea which so distressed

her, "oh, easily I should imagine. You would only have to walk about the streets, asking everyone you met if they had seen an old woman and a cripple going about together, and could direct you to their abode. You would be sure to find them; old women and cripples are such very unusual sights in the metropolis."

She covered her face with her hands, she could not bear that he should witness the agony he jeered at.

Then she asked outright, as if in desperation:

"James, have *you* had any news of Bertie since he went, has any letter come for me from him? If so, in God's name, I entreat of you to give it me!"

She evidently could not part with the preconceived notion that her husband knew more of the matter than she did. But he also had formed his ideas upon the subject, and was as loath to relinquish them as she was. Yet, how could he have resisted that voice of passionate entreaty, those mournful pleading eyes?

"I believe you have asked me that question once before," he said, "or something very similar to it. If you think I have your brother anywhere concealed about my person, Helena,

you had better come and search me, but I am afraid you will find it lost trouble. The fact is, you have had too much faith in a promise made on the spur of the moment. He said he would write to you, probably after a time he may do so ; but considering his habits are not of the most quiet and respectable order, it would be strange if a first introduction to the dissipations of London left him much leisure for writing letters, even supposing he has been sober enough since his departure to enable him to hold a pen."

Nelly only waited to hear the sarcasm conveyed in his last words before she left the room. She felt that it was useless to appeal further to the feelings of a man who had none. She had arrived at last at the true knowledge of her husband's character. His malice and resentment once thoroughly roused, the sight of misery made as much impression on him as water does upon a stone. But, from that day, her strength rapidly declined. She swallowed the medicine which Dr. Monkton thought fit to prescribe for her, but it made no alteration in her health ; her appetite and spirits became capricious, and she would as often eat voraciously as she would go fasting, or laugh with excitement, as she would sit passive in despair.

But whether one mood was upon her or the other, Nelly was in a constant state of fever.

Her hands and face were always burning, and the plumpness of her cheeks fell in and left her large, blue eyes, surrounded by broad circles of dark violet colour, standing prominently forward and glowing like a fire without flame.

Of course, so evident an alteration could not take place in the doctor's young wife without exciting the comments of all Hilstone; indeed, the town would not have considered it was doing its duty, and certainly would not have been acting up to its long sustained character, if it had left so strictly private and personal a matter alone.

It talked incessantly, its aristocracy talked, and its mobocracy talked, and its hedges and ditches, and bricks and mortar, would all have talked likewise, had they but possessed the gift of language.

The particulars of the "extraordinary change," the why and the wherefore of the "extraordinary change," and the probable duration of the "extraordinary change," in Mrs. Monkton, were fully discussed, not only by Nelly's equals, but by her inferiors.

Mrs. Filmer would loudly call out to Mrs.

Prowse across a drawing-room full of company, to enquire whether her poor sister-in-law appeared in any better spirits than she had done the day before, or whether any news had been heard of that unprincipled young man, her brother ; and Mrs. Pridding, the confectioner's wife, would wag her sage head across the counter at Mrs. Biffins, the grocer's mother, whilst she communicated the news that there was not the least improvement in the state of the doctor's wife, and her own opinion was, that "the poor young creature was took for death."

Hilstone did more than talk, it called to enquire. Day after day, shoals of visitors looked in just to see how "dear Mrs. Monkton" was going on, and to ask if she had received news of Mr. Brooke.

And sometimes Nelly would see her tormenters, and laugh as she parried their curiosity concerning Bertie's silence and her own failing health ; and at others, she would shut herself up in her room and refuse admittance even to the august Mrs. Filmer, or the pertinacious Mrs. Prowse. The latter lady had given her up long ago, and informed her brother of the fact, adding, that what she had mistaken for submission in Helena, had proved

to be only obstinacy; and that now she came to look more closely into her character, she was of opinion that the young man's disposition was the best of the two, "which isn't saying much for your wife," she would spitefully remark in conclusion.

There was only one person in all Hilstone who was any comfort to the unhappy girl at this time, and that was poor, meek, inoffensive Canon Prowse, who (after having listened patiently, perhaps, to a lengthy stricture from his wife, upon the catalogue of Nelly's sins,) would steal away from the shrill sound of her vixenish voice, and (first well assured that he was not watched) quietly enter the portals of No. 15.

There he would probably find the subject of the late discussion sitting all alone in the dusk, with dry eyes and burning hands and a countenance so woe-begone that it touched his very heart, and taking a seat beside her, the good man would spend an hour in quiet talk, which though chiefly maintained by himself, was often remembered by his listener during the sleepless night that followed. And once, when some word or look of Nelly's having appealed more powerfully than usual to his sympathy, he stooped to impress a fatherly kiss upon

her forehead, the poor child's unnatural calmness gave way beneath the unexpected caress, and she found temporary relief in a prolonged fit of weeping.

But this kind of thing could not go on for ever. Christmas-day had come and passed, and been held as drearily as it is possible to hold that festival when unaccompanied by either peace or goodwill, when one bitter morning in January, Dr. Monkton awoke at early dawn to see his wife standing in her night-dress at his bedside, whilst he could just distinguish in the grey light that her lips were moving. At first he imagined she was walking in her sleep, and addressing her in a low voice, desired her to go to bed again; but the next moment he saw she was awake.

"It is of no use my going to bed!" she answered in a low hollow tone, "I cannot sleep —I cannot rest—James! I have come to tell you I must go!"

"Go—go where?" he exclaimed, angry now that he found his disturbance had not been unintentional; "what the deuce are you talking about?"

"I must go to Bertie," she said, still speaking as though she were asleep. "Something has happened to him, and I cannot find out

what it is. It cannot be death, because I am still alive; but he is in some distress or danger. He wants me—he is calling for me—and I must go at once."

"Pooh! you've been dreaming," replied her husband. "Get into bed, Helena, and let's have no more of this nonsense. You'll catch cold standing about in your night-dress," and then perceiving that she made no effort to follow his advice, he started up from his pillow and repeated angrily: "Do you hear what I say to you? Get into bed at once—and hold your tongue. As if it wasn't enough that a man should spend half his nights abroad in weather like this, but he must be waked up at six o'clock in the morning to listen to such folly."

But Nelly had lost all fear of her husband's anger. Instead of doing as he bid her, she moved slowly away to another part of the room, and commenced in a mechanical manner to put a few articles of dress together.

"What are you doing there?" exclaimed Dr. Monkton presently.

"I am going to Bertie!" she answered in a dreamy voice.

He started from his bed, and coming beside her, seized her wrist.

"It is no use doing that, James," she said quietly; "it is of no use trying to keep me here by force. My heart tells me that Bertie is calling for me, and I shall only die by inches if you will not let me go. You cannot separate us—we are one."

"And so are we," he answered, "in the sight of law, if not of Heaven. As you shall find, Helena, if you attempt to disobey me, to your cost. On the day your brother left us, I told you that with my consent you should never hold any communication with him again. What I said then I meant. You have not done it, and you shall not do it whilst I live to prevent you."

She looked into his face, and reading there the truth she had suspected, tore her wrist from his grasp with the strength engendered of a sense of wrong, and turned upon him like a fury.

"You have heard from him!" she loudly exclaimed. "You know where he is and what he is doing. I read it in your eyes—and you have kept the news from me! Oh! shame upon your cruel heart!"

He leant against the bed-post, and smiled sneeringly at her despair.

"Your abuse has not the least power to

affect me," he replied, "nor do I wish to deny the truth of what you say. I *do* know your brother's present address—have known it all along, and have no intention of revealing it to you. He had the politeness to tell me on the day we parted, that you would never have been my wife except from hope of the advantages which a residence here held out to himself. I know it to be the truth. I suspected it at the time I married you; I have been sure of it since you have been separated from him. However, it would not be reasonable of you to expect to have it all your own way. You have had your share of benefit from the arrangement; now comes my turn. You enjoyed your brother's company for five months; you must see how long you can make yourself contented with only mine. For, what I said before, Helena, I emphatically repeat: you shall never see, nor speak with him again!"

"You cannot separate us," she rejoined; her expression relapsing into one of weariness. "If you lock me in a room, James, I shall die at the same time as Bertie. There is but one life between us!"

"Fiddlesticks!" he said contemptuously—"I leave the belief of such stories to old women and fools—I shall not be in the least

afraid of your dying when your brother does, for from all I have heard he is most probably dead at the present moment."

He expected to hear her scream, or see her faint at this announcement, but she did neither. She did not even seem to be moved by it, but remained unshaken in her own belief.

"No! he is not," was all she said. "Bertie is not dead, but he is longing for me—every day and every hour."

"Oh! I am glad you know so much about it," said Dr. Monkton, sarcastically, "as of course you can need no further information from me. And as you seem so clever at divining, you will the more readily understand that I am in earnest when I say, that whether he is alive or dead you must give up all idea of seeing your brother again."

"I can't do that," she said, shaking her head; "I don't care what becomes of me, but I must go to him."

"But you *shall not* go to him," repeated her husband furiously. "He has insulted me as no man ever dared to do before; and if you presume to disobey my orders by attempting to hold any communication with him, I will never own or shelter you again. Thwart me in this—run counter to my express command,

and you leave this house, as he did—never to return!"

The threat appeared to have no power to alarm her; not a muscle of her face moved as it struck upon her ear. She only looked wearily at the breaking dawn.

"Do you hear me, Helena?" demanded Dr. Monkton; "do you understand what I say?"

"Yes! I both hear and understand you," she answered in a low voice.

"Well! mind you obey me then, in this, as in all things, and as a preliminary, go back into your bed and remain there until the proper hour for rising."

To his surprise, she walked across the room, and did as he desired her; but though he followed, neither of them spoke another word, and at his usual time Dr. Monkton rose and went into his dressing-room. His wife did not meet him at the breakfast-table, but he thought it best to make no comment on the omission. She had heard his fixed determination, and knew he meant to act upon it; for one day it would be best perhaps to leave her to digest it at her leisure. But, when his hours for home consultation were over, and he had driven away in his smartly-appointed

brougham, Nelly came down stairs, attired for a walk, which quite charmed the heart of Elizabeth the housemaid, who had been trying in vain for many days past to persuade her to take some exercise.

"You look sadly pale, ma'am," she said, as Nelly passed her in the hall, "but I do hope as the fresh air will put a little life in you—for it's a beautiful morning;" and her mistress thanked her for that, and all her previous kindness, with a fervour that surprised her. It was a beautiful morning, as the servant had remarked, but Nelly kept her veil down closely as she hurried as fast as her failing strength permitted her, through the High Street of Hilstone, and turned into the less frequented road which led to the railway station. There was one thing in which Dr. Monkton had never stinted her, and that was money; and her purse held more than sufficient to enable her to carry out the one purpose which she entertained; to go to London in search of Bertie.

No thought of the difficulties she should encounter on the way had power to deter her. Although she had parted with his card to old Aggie, she had the name of Nigel Brooke's club graven on her mind, and her object was

to seek her cousin's aid, and hand in hand with him to ransack the town, until they lighted on the house which held her brother.

When she arrived at the railway station, a bell was ringing furiously.

"Now then, Miss!" exclaimed a frantic porter, as she entered the station room; "train's just a going, have you got your ticket?"

"No!" she replied, quietly.

The porter was disgusted at her indifference. "Just like them women!" he inwardly ejaculated, "thinks the world's made for 'em, and that everything must bide their convenience. —Well, then, you'll lose your train," he said, aloud, "for she's just off;" and, as he spoke, with a scream and a whistle the line of carriages moved slowly away.

"There ain't another to Stokely for the next four hours," said the porter, with malicious satisfaction, as her eyes followed the departing conveyance.

"I'm going to London," she replied, with a heavy sigh.

"Why didn't you say that before, Miss?" said the official, aggrieved to think his sarcasm should have been so wasted; "the next up train's due in fifteen minutes, but you can't take your ticket till the Headley train's passed.

So the best thing you can do is to rest yourself in the waiting-room till that's come in."

She looked so young and so sadly tired, that for all her fancied stupidity, the porter's eyes followed her with compassion as she wearily dragged herself to the place indicated.

When she procured her ticket, and found her way again upon the platform, the train for London had arrived, and she had no further difficulty in proceeding.

Two hours of weary travelling, during which she scarcely dared raise her eyes, lest some fellow-passenger should speak to or recognise her, and she was landed at one of the large London terminuses, amidst an army of porters, omnibuses, and cabs.

Nelly had heard much of London; of its great extent, continuous traffic, and overflowing population, but she had had no idea that one of its stations alone could be so busy a scene as now presented itself to her. Numbers of people bustled past her, too hurried even to look up as they collected their luggage, fought for the cabs, or vehemently disputed their fares. She alone seemed to have no aim or object, as she wandered listlessly up and down the platform, too nervous to speak to any of the officials, and yet quite ignorant of

how to procure what she wanted, without their aid.

"Any luggage, Miss?" demanded a porter, as he noted her bewildered look.

She shook her head, and passed him, only wishing she had had courage to speak.

"Cab, Miss?" shouted a hansom, hailing her with his whip; but she thought he might be addressing some one else, and did not like to answer him.

At last the platform was, comparatively speaking, empty; another train was due upon the next line of rail, and most of the porters had crossed to receive it. The cabstand also was nearly deserted, and when Nelly was next asked if she did not need a conveyance she mustered courage to walk up to the vehicle, and address the driver—

"Cabman! can you take me *anywhere?*"

The sad eyes and the wistful face, no less than the apparent absurdity of the question, made the man think for a moment that the lady who spoke to him was not quite right in her mind, but if so, he considered, there was sure to be a reward offered for her recovery in a day or two, and he might as well earn it as any one else.

"To be sure, Miss," he replied, "jumping off

his box; "anywheres you like to name; all round the world, if so be it's your pleasure."

"I want to go to the ——" she said, naming one of the large West End Clubs: "do you know where that is?"

"To be sure, Miss—all right—jump in!" replied cabby, to whom this request seemed but a confirmation of his previous surmise. He put her into his vehicle, and rattled her off to the place indicated. When he stopped, it was in a large square, and he came round to the cab-window, and pointed out a tall melancholy-looking building, at the opposite side of the road, to Nelly's notice.

"That there's the Club, Miss! now who may you want to see there?—no ladies admitted, you know."

"Oh! are they not, really?" she enquired; "may I not just go up the steps to ask a question?"

"Better not, Miss!" replied the cabman, shaking his head, "I can give a message for you as well as you could say it yourself."

"Then will you please enquire if Mr. Brooke is there—Mr. Nigel Brooke, of Orpington."

"Ain't in the Club, at present;" was the reply delivered a minute afterwards.

"Then ask them for his other address—for

his private address," said Nelly, confidently; "they must know where I can find him."

"They don't know nothing of his private address, Miss," was the disheartening answer, "and he ain't been there for days."

"Then I must wait till he comes," she passively replied, as she leant back in the cab, and folded her hands, "I must wait here till I see him—it can't be long."

"But it may be ever so long," argued the driver, who did not relish the idea of standing about in the cold; "you'd best let me drive you somewheres, Miss, and leave your address for the gentleman."

"I have nowhere to go to," said the girl, sadly. "I have no other friend in London but himself. I must wait here till he comes;" and she seemed quite resigned to an indefinite delay.

"Knew she was cracked!" soliloquised the cabman, as he walked to and fro, and embraced himself with a view to promoting his circulation; "was sure of it, the first moment I clapped eyes on her," and then he ran away to get a glass of beer—and then he trotted to and fro again—and then he consulted his silver watch, and found that his horse had already been standing for an hour in the cold.

"Look here, Miss!" he said, leaning confidentially upon the window sill; "I should be very sorry for to put you to any inconvenience, but my hoss has been standing here for better than an hour, and we shall both be frozen if we keep still much longer. 'Tain't a day for this sort of work, to say nothing of my being able to make double the money by moving about; so, if you're bent upon stopping here, which is quite contrary to the advice I'd give you, you must let me put you into another cab, for I've had enough of this job, and that's the truth!"

But as he was speaking to her, a light flashed into the patient eyes of his fare, such as he had not seen there before, and her little hands tried hard to push his burly figure on one side.

"Oh! stand away, please, do stand away!" she said, with excited utterance. "Don't you see, there he is, coming along the pavement? Nigel! Cousin Nigel, don't pass me, I am here!"

The last words were spoken loudly, and in another moment, one of two gentlemen who had been walking arm-in-arm as she had indicated, rushed across the road and opened the cab-door.

"Nelly!" he exclaimed. "Good God! is it possible that I see you? Have they permitted you to come at last; but what are you doing *here*, and by yourself?"

"Oh! Nigel!" she said, clinging to him, "no one has given me leave, no one knows that I have come, I ran away alone. Bertie wants me, I am sure he does, but I don't know where he is, and I came here to see you, that you might find him for me."

She spoke and looked so wildly, that the cabman was more than ever convinced that she was not in her right mind, and even Nigel Brooke had a passing fear, lest distress and grief should have unsettled her.

"You will come with me, will you not?" she said, imploringly, as she marked the expression in his eye. "You will come and help me look for Bertie?"

"Of course," he answered; "give me one moment to speak to the friend whom I have left, and I will go with you, Nelly, to the world's end," and after he had done as he desired, he directed the cabman where to drive, and entering the vehicle, sat down by her side. She lay back in her corner of it, gazing at him as though he had been her guardian angel.

"We will find him together, Cousin Nigel,

will we not ?" she said, after a pause. "Oh! they have been cruel—so cruel—to me since he left. They have kept back all his letters, and never given me one scrap of news about him. They have nearly killed me, Nigel! and if it had not been for the hope of meeting him again, I *should* have died."

"Poor child!" he said, as he observed her wasted looks, and held her burning hand in his. "If I can call him to account for this, I will!"

"Do you think we are *sure* to find him?" she said, alluding to her brother. "He is very ill, and wants me, I have known that for weeks past, but they would not tell me so, nor give me his address."

"Then how can you possibly have known it, Nelly?" asked her cousin, in surprise.

"By what I have felt here," she answered, pressing her hand upon her heart. "Something here has been dying in me slowly for weeks past."

"Then you are quite prepared to find your brother ill?"

"Quite," she replied, sadly, "for I know he is."

"You have guessed the truth, unfortunately," said her cousin.

"Then have you seen him, Nigel, have you seen and spoken to Bertie? Ah! I knew, I felt you would if ever you received that card."

"I have been in close communication with him, dear Nelly, for a month past. I am taking you straight to the house where he now lies. He is very ill, but I have nursed him through his illness, and we are reconciled to one another. He has wanted nothing—rest assured of that—except the sister I am taking to him now."

He uttered these sentences slowly, but with the tenderest feeling, and Nelly, upon hearing them, had no power to ask the questions which she longed to put, but could only ejaculate "Thank God," and express her gratitude through tears.

In a few minutes more the cab had stopped before a handsome house in Curzon Street, which Nigel Brooke had hired for his mother and himself. The cabman threw open the door of his vehicle noisily, as cabmen will, and as Nelly followed her cousin into the hall, a gentleman (in whom, to her amazement, she recognised their guardian, Mr. Ray) issued from a room on the ground floor, with his finger on his lip, to deprecate so unusual a disturbance; but when he saw by whom Nigel

Brooke was accompanied, he dropped his hand again from sheer surprise, and would have detained and spoken to her, had not Nelly hurried past him. She felt that where he had come from, Bertie lay, and she had no time, no thought, for any other recognition. Closely followed by her cousin, she pressed into the room, in which, though several people were assembled, she saw but one object, the form of her twin brother, wasted, ah! how wasted! yet alive, and from his glad, expectant look, already waiting her.

With a cry, which was born half of sorrow and half of joy, Nelly sprang forward, and clasped him in her arms; and then there followed a deep silence, which everybody present felt too sacred to be broken.

Bertie himself was the first to speak.

"I have—waited—for this—darling!" he faintly whispered. "I only—waited — till you—came!"

Then, placing one wasted hand in the clasp of Nigel Brooke, who stood beside his bed, he put the other fondly round his sister's neck, and drawing her head downwards till their faces met, placed his cold lips against her own, and so died!

## CHAPTER XIV.

### IN WHICH NELLY LEARNS THE HISTORY OF HER BIRTH.

THE disinclination which he naturally felt to meet his cousin Nelly after her marriage, was was not the sole reason that had induced Nigel Brooke to leave the Chase. It was the most powerful, perhaps, but not the most urgent. *That* was connected with his mother.

Mrs. Brooke has already been represented as a weak-minded and frivolous woman, partial to the society of people much younger than herself, and very open to flattery.

Deprived of the companionship of Nelly Brooke, and having quarrelled with her "charming" doctor, she was not long in finding candidates for her favour, to supply their places, amongst whom was a certain Major Hazell, a man of about the age of her own son, who, from being at first simply intimate at the Chase, became by degrees so particular in his attentions to the old lady, that it was

evident he intended to make her a proposal of marriage. At this prospect, which was patent to all, Mrs. Brooke simpered like a girl of seventeen, whilst Nigel felt nothing but annoyance.

Although his father had seen fit to bequeath the bulk of his large fortune to himself, he had left his widow sufficiently independent to render her money an object of attraction to a penniless man like Major Hazell, who would not, so Nigel guessed, be particular to a shade about the age of the woman he married, so long as her income was enough to keep him in comfort. And although she was silly and vain, and often the cause of vexation to himself, it distressed Nigel Brooke to think that his mother should become, at her time of life, the prey of an adventurer, for with his present intentions towards her, he could think of Major Hazell in no other light.

To reason with Mrs. Brooke, however, was all that he could do, and reasoning was of no avail; she either could not, or she would not, see that the idea of anything like love passing between herself and a man of Major Hazell's age was absurd, and the slightest allusion to his probable object in courting her, was sufficient to bring down such a storm of tearful re-

proaches, that her son was not tempted to try the effect too often. Then he had hoped that a removal from Orpington might turn her thoughts into another direction, or divert those of her professed admirer, and it was partly for that reason, and wholly with that wish, that he had taken the house in Curzon Street, which they then occupied; not that their departure from the Chase had had the effect which he desired, for Major Hazell had followed them to London a few weeks afterwards, and made a formal proposal of marriage to Mrs. Brooke, which she, as formally, had accepted, so that, added to her former airs and graces, Nigel had now the further mortification of seeing his mother ape all the blushing modesty of a young fiancée, and engaged day after day in amassing a magnificent wardrobe in which to appear under her new condition.

He had tried all he could to dissuade her from taking such a step, and he had failed; there was nothing left to be done but to put as good a face upon the matter as he could.

He had been in the thick of the annoyance caused by this occurrence, when one day, on calling at his club, an ill-spelt and almost illegible note, which old Aggie had got some one to trace for her on a dirty piece of paper,

was put into his hand; with the intimation that a very old woman had called four or five times at the club in order to see him, and on the occasion of her last visit, had left that behind her, to be given to him as soon as possible.

Having heard nothing of his cousin's arrival in London, or of his quarrel with Dr. Monkton, Nigel Brooke was at first totally at a loss to understand *who* it was that presented her "humbel respecks" to him, or so earnestly entreated him to visit her young master, at his lodgings in one of the dirty little thoroughfares that intersect the Strand: and had it not been that the last sentence informed him it was by "mis nely's" desire that the request was made, he would probably have considered the communication as some hoax, not worthy his attention. But those magic letters (when he had guessed the name they were intended to represent) were all-sufficient to command his immediate services.

Within an hour of receiving the unsightly scrawl, he was at the given address, hearing a roundabout statement of the whole proceeding from the quivering lips of poor old Aggie, who felt certain that Miss Nelly must either be dead or dying, at Hilstone, because she had

never forwarded the box of clothes, as she had promised to do, nor even answered the letters which Master Robert had sent her.

The accounts of "Master Robert" himself were very unsatisfactory. His summary dismissal from the doctor's house, and the subsequent silence of his sister, appeared to have had a most unfavourable effect upon his mind and behaviour. From the nurse's story, he seemed to be spending more money in a night than ought to suffice him for a month ; and to be living in a round of low dissipation which must, eventually, prove as fatal to his health, as it already had, to his respectability. To hear all this grieved Nigel Brooke exceedingly; for Nelly's sake, far more than for his own ; for he knew how keen a grief the knowledge of such conduct on her brother's part would be to her.

That she should not have written, or in any way noticed Bertie's letters, was at that time as incomprehensible to him as to old Aggie. But before the nurse had finished her narration, her listener had formed two resolutions. One was, to rescue Robert Brooke from his present life of folly, the other to communicate the sad effects which the estrangement had had upon him to Dr. Monkton.

And the latter task, although, to Nigel Brooke, by far the most unpleasant of the two, was as faithfully performed as was the former. He wrote to Dr. Monkton, not once, but a dozen times ; not only when he first found out that Robert Brooke was on the road to ruin, but when, after the wretched boy, borne down by disappointment and a reckless disregard of health, was stretched upon his dying bed, and in a condition to excite the sympathy of the coldest heart on earth.

By that time, Nigel Brooke, by dint of perseverance in his charitable undertaking, by dint of gentle reasoning, of appeals to his love for his twin-sister, and by repeated acts of kindness from himself—had succeeded in touching some hidden spring in Robert's nature, and effecting a complete reconciliation between them. How it came about the lad himself could never say ; but he knew that he had been very obstinate, and very broken down by sickness and despondency, before he could accept the hand so cordially extended by his cousin, or consent to be made comfortable at his expense.

But when that day arrived—a happy day for Nigel, and he bore poor dying Bertie and his faithful nurse to Curzon Street, the breach

was healed, and perfect confidence restored; and from that time until his death Robert Brooke could never sufficiently reproach himself for the estrangement which he had caused between them.

Meanwhile no letter came from Dr. Monkton, until his correspondent (unable to account for so ungentlemanly a disregard of his repeated communications) expressed in writing his intention of going down to Hilstone to learn the reason.

Then he received an answer, but couched in such terms as he had thought no man who deserved the name would have written of another. In it Dr. Monkton detailed the affronts he had received from Robert Brooke, and the effect which separation from her brother had had upon his wife, and without noticing the fact of the young man's approaching death, which Nigel had strongly urged upon his consideration, emphatically refused to allow Nelly to go to London to see her brother, or to hold any communication with him whatever.

It was a case in which a cousin's authority was useless.

Nelly belonged to her husband, and was under his control, and the only way in which Nigel could assist her was to entreat Dr.

Monkton by every persuasion in his power, to alter his determination, which he continued to do, until he received a final refusal conveyed in so curt and peremptory a manner as to forbid his making another attempt. Meanwhile every excuse that could be thought of was made to poor Bertie for the prolonged delay in his sister's appearance, until at last he had grown too weak to be able to think or feel very strongly upon any subject, although he never relinquished the fixed idea that he should see her again before he died. When it was evident that his cousin's end was drawing near, Nigel Brooke had written to his guardian, Mr. Ray, to come and say farewell to him, and things had arrived at this pass when he so unexpectedly encountered Nelly in the cab outside the club, and conveyed her also to her dying brother's side.

It was a long time before the girl was in a proper state to hear all this, herself.

For many days after Bertie's death she was unfit to be spoken to; for weeks she could not listen calmly to any particulars concerning his illness; and months had passed before she was fully persuaded that she also was not going to die and be laid by his side in the quiet grave in Little Bickton churchyard, where, at her

express desire, Nigel Brooke and Mr. Ray had conveyed her brother's body.

But when she was able to converse with old Aggie on the subject, and to listen to the nurse's details of her cousin's generosity and kindness, she felt as though she could never love him sufficiently in return for what he had done.

At the same time she asked to hear the history of her own and brother's birth.

"Tell me all about it, Aggie!" she had said on that occasion, "and don't be in the least afraid of wounding my sensibility; whilst my darling was here I felt the shame of it for his sake, but now that he is gone, nothing can ever give me pain or pleasure, and I should like to know the whole truth before I meet him again."

"Well then, my deary!" replied the old woman: "You've heard me say, a many times, how that I nursed your poor mamma before ever you and Master Robert was born. Your grandpapa didn't live at Little Bickton then, Miss Nelly, but at a village not any bigger, in the lower parts of Devon, of which he were the rector. He were married twice, you know, and when he took his second wife his son by his first lady (which was Mr. Nigel's

father) was fast growing up into a young man. Well! after a year or so your poor mamma was born, and lor' what a fuss they did make over her: I don't believe never a baby was made such a fuss about before, and as she grew older, she was that spoilt there was no holding her.

"I wouldn't wish to say a word against her, Miss Nelly, and she dead and buried now, poor young thing, nigh upon twenty years; but still you wishes to hear the whole truth, and her wilfulness was much at the bottom of it all.

"She wouldn't mind your grandpapa nor your grandmamma, no more than if they'd never spoke to her; and so you may believe that she didn't mind anything what *I* might say. Indeed, she were mostly as contrary as she could stand, and I believe the only body that could in the least control her, was her big brother, Mr. Nigel's father.

"He had married a few years after your grandpapa took his second wife, and there warn't so much difference between the ages of their children, not more than a matter of four or five years perhaps, and so, in course, he looked upon Miss Helen quite as a child, and never failed to speak to her when he see fit,

which used to bring words sometimes between his father and himself.

"Well, she grew up, Miss Nelly, until she was close upon seventeen, tall and straight as a poplar, but as unlarned as any cotter's girl, for she never would apply herself to her books, and her papa let her do just as she chose.

"She was very pretty, prettier than yourself, which is saying a great deal, to my mind, though I never liked her face as well as I do your'n, my deary; you've more the look of your poor papa, to say the truth, for though strangers took you to be so similar, Master Robert was the most like his mamma, and I always thought so.

"Miss Helen, she seemed never at home, but was always tearing about the lanes on her pony, or wandering in the woods, as wild as the pony itself when it was turned out to grass.

"It was just at this time that she made the acquaintance of a young gentleman, very little older than herself, who was living in a neighbouring town. He wasn't in the army exactly, but he was studying for it under a master, and expected to join a regiment very shortly.

"How your poor mamma come to know him first, I can't tell you, but he called at the rectory one afternoon, and then it seemed that

they had met each other before, and was well acquainted. Your grandmamma made the young gentleman as welcome as she did everybody, so did your grandpapa; so from that day he was for ever riding over to see them; and he and Miss Helen, they used to go away together into the woods and fields and read poetry and such like rubbish, and sometimes not come back for hours together.

"When Mr. Nigel's father, who was a merchant and living up in London, come to hear of all the nonsense that was going on between his sister and this young gentleman, he was very angry, and he come straight down into Devon and spoke to your grandpapa about it. But lor, Miss Nelly, what manner of use was that? You know what your grandpa was of late years, my dear, and though I don't mean to say he was quite so bad in the days I speak of, yet he never took much notice of anything which lay out of his parish business; he did go so far, I believe, as to tell your grandmamma that he thought Miss Helen was getting a little too much liberty in the matter, but she only smiled at his fears, and said they was just a boy and girl together, and no possible harm could come of it. And so things went on in the same way till the young gentleman's time

was up, and he had to go to some foreign place, Malta I think they called it, for to join the army, and when your grandpapa and grandmamma see how Miss Helen took on at his departure, I think they was a little pleased to think as he was really a going.

"For you must remember, Miss Nelly, that in consequence of his being such a lad and almost from school like, there hadn't been no talk of marriage between them, nor any thought of such a thing, so far as your grandpapa wished, or we could tell. But the young gentleman hadn't been gone more than a few months before we servants began to see as there was something very wrong in the house. Your grandpapa, who wasn't a young man by that time, Miss Nelly, he seemed to break down all of a sudden, and your grandmamma went about as if she was going mad with grief, and Miss Helen, she warn't much better, poor thing, as she had little need to be; for after a bit it all come out, though I can hardly tell you how, that she had got into trouble and shame, such as had never been heard on in that house before.

"The news of his sister's disgrace was sent, I suppose, to Mr. Nigel's father, for what did he do but go straight off from London to

Malta in a ship, and without consulting your grandpapa on the subject, invited the young gentleman (which was your poor papa, you know, my dear) to fight him with pistols, as was then the fashion.

"And now, Miss Nelly, this is the part of the story for which your uncle has always had so much blame thrown at him, but I can't see it in so bad a light myself. Your poor papa was doubtless very young and thoughtless (I believe he was about come of age at the time) and the difference of years between them went a great deal towards making up the noise there was about it; but still the truth remained, that he had brought his sister into trouble, and no gentleman, I am sure, ever dreamt of blaming Mr. Nigel's father for doing as he had done. Poor Master Robert used to say (as I've often heard him) that his uncle had *murdered* his father; but 'twasn't the case, Miss Nelly, and poor dear, he came to acknowledge that he had deceived himself, before he died. They met, and fought a duel, it is true, and the young gentleman, (who was an honourable good lad, I dare to say, or he wouldn't have left such a child as you behind him,) was so overcome by the shame of what he had done, that he fired his pistol in the air, but Mr.

Nigel's father, having no knowledge that such was his intentions, took a straight aim, and shot him right through the heart.

"But what made the worst quarrel between your grandpapa and your uncle, Miss Nelly, was the fact that after the poor young gentleman's death, a sealed letter was found in his portmantle, directed to your mamma, in which he said he never should forgive himself for the injury he had done her, and that he was going to get leave to England, as soon as might be, and marry her straight off.

"And I believe he come of a very high family, and would have been a lord some day, if he had only lived long enough, and had a power of money into the bargain. And that's what Master Robert used to be a-thinking of, when he said, that had it not been for his uncle's violence, you and he would have been as well off, or better, maybe, than his cousin were. So your grandpapa had two disappointments to contend against; the loss of such a grand marriage for his daughter, and the loss of her good name into the bargain.

"Well, my deary, it was but three or four months after, that you and your poor brother came struggling into this world of misery, but sad changes had took place, even before then.

Your grandpapa and uncle had come to such shameful words that they had parted with many a wicked oath, never to speak to one another again; and it wasn't long before we heard that Mr. Nigel's father had gone off to the Indies with his wife and son, with the intention of setting up in business there.

"Then came your grandmamma's death, which was terrible sudden, owing to her having the heart disease, and being unable to contend with so much trouble; and your poor mamma, who had never rightly held up her head since the news of her misfortune got abroad, and who felt her own mother's death sadly, she just waited to give birth to you two poor helpless babies before she flickered out of life herself. That was the last stroke to your grandpapa. I think if Miss Helen had been spared, however much ashamed he may have been of her, he would have tried to rub on somehow; but it didn't seem at first as if he could ever believe that she was gone.

"But directly the mould was filled in over her coffin, he left being a clergyman, and gave up his house and his living, and moved off to Little Bickton with Master Robert and yourself. You always went by the name of Brooke,

my dear, having no claim to any other, and so he used to give out as you were the orphans of a younger son who had come by a sudden death, and no one but myself and Mr. Ray (who was an old college friend of his) ever guessed to the contrary. So that's how I came to be your nurse, Miss Nelly, my dear, for of all his servants, your grandpapa only took me to look after you both."

"And he couldn't have chosen a better friend for us, or a more faithful nurse, Aggie," said Nelly, as the story was concluded.

"Haven't you no curiosity to learn your father's name, my bird?" enquired the old woman, after a pause.

She shook her head.

"No! I have no wish to hear it, or to think of it! I cannot feel as though I ever had a father. Thank you, Aggie, for what you have told me, but please never speak of it again. Perhaps I am hard-hearted; but when I think of all the bitter misery which the knowledge of our birth afforded Bertie, I lose all sense of pity or compassion, and can only feel the shame of the recital."

## CHAPTER XV.

### TAKE ME BACK TO LITTLE BICKTON.

ALTHOUGH sorely disinclined to hold any further correspondence with Dr. Monkton, Nigel Brooke considered it his duty to inform him without delay, of his wife's unexpected arrival in Curzon Street, and the subsequent death of her brother. The semi-conscious state in which Nelly then lay, utterly forbid all idea of her immediate return to Hilstone, but her cousin expressed his willingness to take her there as soon as ever she was fit to be removed, unless her husband should prefer coming to London, to escort her home himself.

Sufficient had dropt from Nelly's lips, even in her half-wandering and disconnected sentences, to render him aware that a very serious estrangement had taken place between them, but he trusted that the girl's devotion to her brother, added to the real cause which she had had for fear, would, now that the bone of con-

tention was removed, combine to soften her husband's heart towards her.

After a few days of uncertainty, however, he received an answer to his letter, written in the third person, in which Dr. Monkton begged to inform Mr. Brooke, that as Mrs. Monkton was fully aware, before she left her home, of the conditions attached to her taking such a step, he concluded that she did so without any desire of returning thither, whilst, for his own part, he had no intention of receiving her again.

This was discouraging, certainly, but at the time that he received it, the house (what with Nelly's illness, and Bertie's impending funeral) was in such a state of confusion, that Nigel had not leisure to feel the indignation at the doctor's letter, with which subsequent perusals inspired him.

For several weeks he let the matter rest, and then, for Nelly's sake, he felt that he must make another effort. For his own, he would but too gladly have kept her always under the same roof with his mother and himself, but however innocent, she could not live apart from her husband without incurring blame, which, as her nearest relative, it became his duty, if possible, to prevent; so that, when she

was once more able to sit up and be reasoned with, he spoke to her upon the subject.

Her wasted figure and her drawn white face, looked so much the more white and wasted for her deep mourning robes, that Nigel's heart failed him as he thought of delivering her once again to the tender mercies of her husband, but he knew it was the right thing to be done, and he trusted to Providence to bless the right.

He had expected to hear her remonstrate against such a proceeding, or even utterly refuse to play her part in it, but on the contrary, it almost seemed a matter of indifference to her. She recoiled a little at the thought of encountering Dr. Monkton, but was at that period so fully impressed with the idea that a few weeks, or at the most, months, would see her re-united to her brother, that it was of slight consequence where or with whom she spent the intervening time.

"Only it will be lost trouble, Cousin Nigel, I am afraid," she said, "for he told me if I went, it should be never to return, and—you don't know him as I do."

"Circumstances have altered since then, Nelly!" was Nigel's answer, "and whether we succeed or not, you will have the satisfac-

tion of feeling that you have done your duty."

Accordingly, he took her down to Hilstone on the following day, and leaving her at the "Sovereign," which was the principal hotel in the place, proceeded by himself to call on Dr. Monkton.

They had travelled by an early train, and he was fortunate enough to find the doctor at home, busily engaged upon his luncheon. The meeting between the two men was necessarily formal, but for his cousin's sake, Nigel Brooke made it as civil as was in his power.

"You will doubtless guess my errand, Dr. Monkton," he commenced. "Your wife is at this moment in the town, and willing to return to your protection, and I have come beforehand to ask if you are ready to receive her."

The doctor, who, at his visitor's request, had recommenced his meal, merely elevated his eyebrows, as he replied:

"Indeed? but I thought I had made my intentions on this subject fully known to you, Mr. Brooke."

"I received a letter from you, certainly," said Nigel, "written under the smart of first hearing that your wife had disobeyed your orders, but I can hardly believe that you will

keep to the determination which you then expressed. Nelly did wrong in leaving Hilstone, Dr. Monkton, there is no doubt of that, but you will confess that you had given her provocation, in refusing to furnish her with any news concerning her brother's welfare."

"I do not suppose, Mr. Brooke, that you are here to discuss so purely personal a matter as the cause of quarrel between Mrs. Monkton and myself. It is sufficient for your satisfaction that you should know that she left my house on the clear understanding that she was not to return to it, and that I did not make such an agreement with the design of breaking it upon the first opportunity."

"But think of her youth, Dr. Monkton! Compared with men of our age, Nelly is almost a child! From her birth she has been devoted to her brother, as no one should know better than yourself."

"Pray, by that sentence do you intend to make any allusion to the reason for which your cousin did me the honour of accepting my proposals of marriage?"

At this question, Nigel looked astonished.

"By no means," he replied. "Whatever my suspicions may have been, I have never heard aught from either Nelly or her brother

to make me think she had any motive for marrying you except the right one."

"Oh! indeed! They have been more reticent with you, then, than they saw fit to be with me. Neither Mrs. Monkton nor her brother had any hesitation in averring that she took my name in order to minister to his dissipated tastes."

"Knowing her as I do, I can scarcely believe that to be the case," said Nigel, "but were it so, he is dead, and can never irritate nor disgrace you again. Can that fact have no power to alter your feelings with respect to your wife? She has felt the blow acutely, so much so, that you would be astonished to see the alteration grief has made in her. She holds the firm conviction (a fallacious one, I trust, but still true to her) that it will not be long before she follows him to the grave, and I think that in her present state of mind, a few kind words respecting her dead brother, and a little sympathy with her own trouble, would be enough to bind her once more to yourself. Surely it is worth the trial. Nelly has all the qualities requisite to make as devoted a wife as she has been a sister, and although she cannot live apart from you without having some slur cast on her good name, I do not urge

these points on your consideration for my own sake as being connected with herself. My mother's house is open to her, and as long as I live, I should for many reasons consider it a privilege to be permitted to assist her, so that when I say that it is my earnest wish to see you reconciled, I hope you will believe that I say it for your good, more than for my own."

"I have not the slightest desire to deprive you of one of your advantages, Mr. Brooke," exclaimed the doctor, as he rose from the luncheon table, "and since you appear to reckon assisting your cousin, even to affording her a home, not the least of them, I beg to intimate that you will not find me put any obstacle in your way. Mrs. Monkton is at liberty for the future to live where and with whom she chooses, so long as it is not with me."

Although Nigel Brooke had been speaking so calmly, and apparently with so little resentment, it had been a difficult matter from the commencement of the interview, for him to keep his temper, and Dr. Monkton's last speech thoroughly upset him. It was not so much the words used by Nelly's husband, as the sardonic expression of his face, and the slighting, sneering air in which he alluded to her, that so much nettled her cousin.

He saw the man now as she had seen him; worse than even *his* jealousy had ever pictured him to be; and felt what the poor child in whose behalf he stood there must have undergone, when left entirely in the power of one who could look and speak of her like this.

"It is all very well, Dr. Monkton," he said, rising also to his feet; "it is all very well of you to affect to cast off so entirely the woman whom you have sworn to protect and cherish. But the law does not permit you to do so. You cannot—for one act of rebellion, however aggravated, disown a wife who expresses herself willing to return to her allegiance. Since I have heard the terms in which you can bring yourself to speak of her, I should be as loath to place my cousin in your hands as you could to be forced to take her back again; but if she consents to resign that, of which you have no right under present circumstances to deprive her, I, as her nearest relative, shall expect you to make a suitable provision for her wants. Consent to do that (as you must consent), and I will prove myself as ready to convey her from Hilstone as I can answer she will be to go."

"Mrs. Monkton had four thousand pounds settled on her at her marriage, by myself,"

replied the doctor, "and I presume she will now inherit anything that her brother may have left behind him. Of so much I have neither the power nor the wish to deprive her; but she will get nothing more from me."

"And you can really resign her with so little feeling," exclaimed Nigel Brooke,—"a woman with such a capability for loving—with so large and true and innocent a heart?"

The doctor smiled sarcastically.

"You seem so well read in the catalogue of her virtues, Mr. Brooke, that I think you had better appropriate them: I will make over my interest in them to you on the spot."

"I did not come here to be insulted, Dr. Monkton, nor would I have borne as much as I already have from you, except for Nelly's sake—I wish you a very good morning. I see that by stopping here longer I shall only waste my time. What further needs to be settled between us, can be best arranged through writing." And with a stiff inclination of the head Nigel Brooke quitted the room.

As he walked back to the hotel where he had left his cousin, his indignation burned fiercely within him. This was the man, then,

to whom Nelly had chained herself for life, and to secure health and affluence for the poor body now rotting in the grave to which it had descended all the quicker for its brief course of dissipation. Yet, much as he disliked and despised Dr. Monkton, he could not quite believe but that his indifference must be partly affected.

He was very obstinate, perhaps, or very much wounded at his wife's want of affection for him, and he had assumed that tone before a stranger of his own sex, in order to hide how deeply he was hurt. It could not be—it was impossible that any man could cherish so bitter and rancorous a hatred against a young affectionate girl, only because in the desperation of suspense she had dared to violate his will, and seek a dying brother.

It was not in Nigel Brooke's power to realise such a feeling, and by the time he had again reached Nelly's presence he had almost persuaded himself that could she be brought face to face with Dr. Monkton, all would yet be well between them.

She was seated in her old attitude, gazing fixedly upon the floor; but as her cousin entered the room she slowly raised her eyes to his.

"I have not been successful, Nelly, I regret to say," he said, answering the look which met his own. "Monkton seems very obstinate and unforgiving; but, perhaps, considering what has gone before, I am not the best mediator that could have been chosen between you."

"I told you so," she said quietly. "I knew that he would not forgive me. He never forgives anyone. Let us go back to London, Cousin Nigel—it is of no use staying here, and the very air of Hilstone seems to stifle me."

"But I am so unwilling to give up the chance, dear Nelly," he replied. "You are so young—you seem entirely to forget how great a disadvantage in the world's eyes it will be to you to be known to be living apart from your husband."

"Not so great as it would be in my own to be living with him under present circumstances," she said, in a low voice.

"But you would return to him if he consented to receive you, Nelly; would you not?"

"Yes! if you think it best, Nigel! I will do whatever you think right. It will be but a little while anyway, and I should wish to die at peace with him and all the world."

"Were you to ask Mrs. Prowse to plead with him for you, might not that have a better effect than any words of mine? She is a woman and a sister, and must feel for the suspense and anxiety which you passed through with regard to poor dear Bertie."

"Must I go to see her, then?" asked Nelly, passively rising.

"I think it will be best, dear; but you shall not go alone. I will order a fly, and take you there myself." And consequently, in another half-hour the cousins found themselves in the drawing-room of Mrs. Prowse.

They had been told that she was in, but she kept them waiting a considerable time; and when she did appear, indignation was superadded to her usual snappishness. Following close upon her heels, but meekly, and as though he knew that he was disobeying orders, there came good Canon Prowse. As they entered, Nelly rose and advanced to meet them.

"Well! Mrs. James!" exclaimed her sister-in-law, "*you* in Hilstone! I could hardly believe but that the servant had misinformed me. And pray to what may I owe the honour of this visit?"

Nelly did not appear in the least intimidated

by this address. She began to speak at once, not rapidly, but slowly and distinctly, and with a pathos in her tone which went to the heart of both her male listeners.

"I have come, Mrs. Prowse, because my Cousin Nigel thought it best I should do so," —(here Nigel Brooke and the canon's wife exchanged a formal salutation,)—"to ask you if you will speak to James for me. He is very angry with me, as I daresay that you know, and does not wish that I should return to live at Hilstone; but Bertie—my brother—is dead —and it will not be long before I follow him, and till that time comes, I should wish to do my duty, if I can. And perhaps James would believe this from you sooner than he would from me, or from my cousin."

These words were delivered so simply, that it was impossible for Mrs. Prowse to affect to misunderstand them.

"You should wish to do your duty, Mrs. James?" she echoed. "Well, that seems rather an extraordinary avowal, after your late behaviour. Running away from Hilstone in broad daylight, and creating such a scandal as I believe was never heard of here before."

"My *dear*," put in the canon, feebly expostulating.

"Well, Canon, and I repeat it, such a scandal as Hilstone had never witnessed before."

"But I went to Bertie," said Nelly, as calmly as at first. "I went to see my brother, Mrs. Prowse, and he was dying; I told James so before I started. I told him I must go, or I should die myself."

"Who you went to makes no difference whatever," snapped Mrs. Prowse, "the infamy of the transaction lay in your presuming to go! And after *my brother* had commanded you not to stir from the house!"

"Pardon me, madam," interposed Nigel Brooke, "but I think the fact that my cousin went to her aunt's house, and to see a brother whom she rightly believed to be dying, *is* some palliation of the case."

"Of course it is," said Canon Prowse, decidedly.

"It's none at all," shrilly exclaimed his wife, "and I'll thank you, Canon, to hold your tongue upon the matter. It's no business of yours, anyway. I say again, that Mrs. James leaving her home in the manner she did, was an infamous proceeding, and I certainly shall not be the one to try and persuade my brother to receive her back after it."

"If we begin to talk of infamy, madam,"

said Nigel Brooke, hotly, "what do you think of Dr. Monkton keeping back all news of her brother's condition from his wife?"

"I think he was perfectly justified in doing so," she tartly replied, "the young man was a most dissipated young man, he was a disgrace to the establishment, and not a fit associate for any respectable person——" but here she was stopped by Nelly, who with burning cheeks, exclaimed:

"He is *dead*, Mrs. Prowse, my dearest brother is dead and gone to heaven, and I will not hear the slightest odium cast upon his memory!"

Mrs. Prowse tittered.

"I know he is *dead*, Mrs. James, I have heard so far, but as to having gone to heaven ——"

"Oh! shame! for shame!" cried Nigel Brooke.

"Be quiet!" shouted her husband, roused from his usual forbearance.

She turned round upon them both like a spit-fire.

"How *dare* you speak to me in that way, young man? And as for *you*, Canon, if you presume to use such a tone towards me again, we will soon see which is master in this house."

"Come away, Nelly, come away," said Nigel, drawing his cousin's arm within his own. "I was wrong to subject you to such a scene as this!"

"Oh, indeed," sneered Mrs. Prowse, "not good enough for her, I suppose. Not good enough company perhaps. We are not the tenants of Orpington Chase, Mr. Brooke, I know, but at all events, our fathers and mothers were married to each other, and we had a name, however humble, which we could call our own."

"Cousin Nigel, let us go!" said Nelly, for the first time, shewing something that was not indifference.

"Woman! will you be silent?" said the Canon angrily, as he pushed his wife to one side. "Nelly, my dear girl, we part friends, do we not?"

She dropped her cousin's arm, and ran back to his side.

"You were always good to me, Canon Prowse," she said, "and so you were to my poor dead Bertie. God bless you for it!"

She put her hand in his, and pressed it firmly; and he stooped down as he had done once before, and kissed her on the forehead.

"Oh, indeed," tittered Mrs. Prowse from

the background. "I had no idea this kind of thing went on, or I should have been quite jealous. Kissing! well to be sure, it is just as well, I think, that my brother is so resolved to keep his word, or we should have Mrs. James running off *in company* next time, instead of alone!"

But she had scarcely concluded her speech before the hall door had slammed upon her visitors; and the Canon, the meek and long-suffering Canon, who scarcely dared in usual say that his soul was his own, turned upon her, and with a suddenness which took her completely by surprise—boxed her ears!

Mrs. Prowse could not believe her senses; no, she could *not* believe her senses, and particularly that sense which caused her sacred ears to ring.

The smartness of the attack had sent her spinning back into the drawing-room; and as she heard the door of her husband's study close and lock behind him, and felt that for the time being, he had escaped her clutches, she had no resource but to sink down on the sofa, and find relief in a burst of angry tears.

"And now, Nelly, what are we to do next?" enquired Nigel Brooke, as having conducted

her back to Curzon Street, they entered once more upon the discussion of her prospects.

"Oh take me back to Little Bickton, Cousin Nigel, let me go back to Little Bickton to Mrs. Weston, and the dear old farm, and live close to the spot where my poor darling lies."

Mrs. Brooke tried hard to reason her niece out of this plan. About to be married herself, and knowing that Nelly, as a married woman, could have no designs upon Nigel, nor Nigel upon her, she had been graciously pleased to resign her jealousy, and to return to her former opinion, that the girl would be a very pleasant and useful companion for herself. Indeed, she had gone so far as to tell her son that his cousin Helena was certainly very much improved by her marriage, and that if dear Hazell had no objection, she thought she should often like to have her to stay with them after they had become one.

But Nigel did not second her design, he was determined not to sanction it; he even suggested that Nelly was too young and too pretty to be a safe visitor in the house of so susceptible a man as his intended step-father; an idea which naturally gave his mother so much offence that she declined to enter upon the subject with him again. But his real rea-

son was scarcely a less important one. He was not afraid for Major Hazell's peace of mind, but sorely for his own.

He would have given worlds to have kept that dear companion, with her sweet, sad face, for ever by his side, but he dared not do it. He knew that his mother's house would always be open to him, and he must be banished from it, if Nelly were admitted there. Even the short time he had lately spent in her society had greatly disturbed the tranquillity which he had hoped he was learning to attain, and he could not risk it further, lest the future might hold something darker for them than he dared to contemplate. She was his cousin, it was true, and he her nearest relation; but he could not forget that she was dearer to him than she should be, and the wife of another man! And Nelly seemed instinctively to share his thoughts, and steadfastly resisting her aunt's entreaties and solicitations, turned from them all to prefer the old petition.

"Take me back to Bickton! for the little time before I join him, (oh, I hope and trust in heaven's mercy, that it will be but a very little time,) let me live close to Bertie's grave, for I feel as though he missed me even there."

So she did as she desired. She went back to live in the old rooms at Bickton Farm, which Nigel would have beautified for her with modern furniture, had she allowed him (but she said, "for such a little while, what did it signify?"); and beneath the roof where Bertie had lived, surrounded by the friends whom Bertie had known, cheered by Mrs. Weston and the Rays, and cared for by old Aggie, Nelly's bruised heart, after a while, began slowly, but certainly, to heal again.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE SPIRIT OF THUG IS AVENGED.

THE early spring had now arrived; Nelly's flying visit to Hilstone, and her rejected offers of reconciliation were things of the past, for though but a few weeks had elapsed since the occurrence, Time had already closed over it like waters above a falling body, and every one who knew them, was aware that a breach had taken place between the doctor and his young wife, so serious as to render it improbable that this world would see it healed again.

Of course there were various opinions on the subject. Some people were not slow to affirm that Mrs. Prowse's temper must be at the bottom of the disagreement, for Nelly had been a favourite with most in Hilstone; whilst others, who judged by hints thrown out by the Canon's wife herself, accredited the poor girl with sins such as her innocence had never dreamed of; and there were those who even went so far as to suggest that her cha-

racter had not been all that Dr. Monkton thought when he married her.

This circumstance, however, had scarcely furnished more than a nine days' wonder for the town of Hilstone, before it found something else, scarcely less remarkable, to feed its curiosity upon. Dr. Monkton himself fell ill. It was the beginning of the month of February, when Mrs. Prowse first observed an alteration in her brother's spirits, which all at once became visibly depressed—an unusual, almost unprecedented case with him. The possessor of feelings singularly blunt, James Monkton was not the man to undergo many changes of temperament. He was never known to be either very jocular or very melancholy; he had been often heard to say that the extremes of happiness or misery were as inexplicable to him as they were unknown. Therefore, when he fell into low spirits, the effect was as remarkable as it was unexpected. Not that he courted observation in the matter; on the contrary, he religiously shunned every allusion to the state of his private feelings, and showed considerable temper when his sister ventured to touch upon the subject.

But, more than once she had suddenly come upon him sitting alone, with his face buried in

his hands, and an inexplicable gloom upon his brow, and although each time he had immediately roused himself, he had not been able to prevent her detecting that it was by force alone that he thus dismissed some unusually painful recollection from his mind.

Mrs. Prowse thought over this matter again and again, but by no possible means could she account for it: to her it was as mysterious as it was strange.

"I cannot imagine what is the matter with James!" she remarked one day, in a burst of unusual confidence to the Canon, "he is more melancholy and self-absorbed than I have ever seen him in his life before—one would really think he had something on his mind."

"Fretting about the quarrel with his wife, most likely," replied the Canon, "at least I am sure *I* should do so, were I in his place."

"Absurd!" said Mrs. Prowse, tossing her head, "*my brother*, I would have you know, Canon, is not a man to do one thing and mean another; and what you would feel under the circumstances is no criterion whatever for James. If he had had (or was ever likely to have had) the least desire to be reconciled to Mrs. James, he would not have stood so firmly in the matter as he did."

"Well! perhaps it's his conscience, then, which is pricking him," suggested her husband, "it ought to, if he possesses one at all."

"Canon!" exclaimed Mrs. Prowse, indignantly, "do you know what you are talking about? I should think *my brother's* conscience was as clear as any man's. He has nothing to reproach himself with, I am quite sure."

"No?" said the Canon, incredulously, "well, I'm glad to hear you say so, my dear, and I hope that the doctor may be able to give his conscience as clean a bill of health as you seem ready to do. Meanwhile, if his mind is so perfectly at ease, it seems strange to me that he should go sitting about in the way you describe with his head buried in his hands. It rather conveys an idea of self-reproach or misery to my mind; but perhaps I am mistaken, and it may only be the attitude of rejoicing innocence."

Mrs. Prowse, with all her claws out, turned round upon her husband, ready to spring, but a look in his eye recalled her to herself, and she was fain to be content with flouncing out of his presence.

She had not forgotten the day on which she had insulted Nelly, and the remembrance of the indignity she had then received at the

Canon's hands, had still the power to make her ears tingle. It had been the commencement of a new era in both their lives. He had shown far less meekness and forbearance since that day, and she had been proportionately more humble. Her brother had proposed that they should again live together, as they had done before his marriage, and she had been anxious to do as he desired, and take up her residence in St. Bartholomew's Street.

But on this plan the Canon had laid a most decided veto.

He had gone further; he had not hesitated to tell the doctor what he thought of his late conduct and unforgiving spirit; and although he would not prevent his wife from visiting her brother's house, he absolutely refused to frequent it himself, or to accept any of the hospitalities tendered him from there. So that Mrs. Prowse's sole satisfaction with regard to No. 15, now consisted in bursting in upon the servants at untoward times, in order to detect their petty sins of negligence or disobedience; or appearing in the kitchen, during meals, to the unmitigated disgust of the whole quintet, in hopes of finding that they were feasting on forbidden viands. Whenever she was fortunate enough to have some misde-

meanour on their parts to relate, she carried the tale with alacrity to her brother; but as she had informed her husband, he had seemed lately to take no interest in anything, and she could not imagine what was the matter with him.

A few mornings after the conversation related, whilst Canon and Mrs. Prowse were seated at their breakfast, a servant entered, to inform them that "Mr. Long, from the doctor's, would be glad if he could speak with them for a minute."

Such a request on the part of "Mr. Long," who generally avoided the house of Mrs. Prowse as though it had been infected, was so unusual, that it provoked immediate curiosity, and the servant was desired to show him into the breakfast-room at once.

"Well! Long?" said Mrs. Prowse, interrogatively, as the man appeared.

Long waited a moment to make sure the other servant had had time to retreat; then opening the door again to glance into the passage, closed it securely, and advanced into the centre of the room.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," he said, in so low a voice that it might almost have been designated a whisper, "for the liberty that I

take in interrupting you at your breakfast hour, but I am not quite easy, I regret to say, about my master."

"Your master!" exclaimed Mrs. Prowse; "why what of him, Long? Isn't he well?"

"I fear not, ma'am; but I dare not approach the subject with the doctor himself, on account of irritating him. I ventured to do so once, and he was annoyed with me, I may say violent. But I am sure that he is ill, ma'am. He has neither eaten nor drank now, for two days past, and his dreams at night seem fearful. Since my mistress's departure I have slept, by my master's orders, in the further dressing-room, so as to be handy, and I hear him calling out sometimes, to that degree that I can't close my eyes. My master complained also of great pain in his shoulder and the back of his neck this morning, indeed he had to stop two or three times during dressing, on that account; but he won't let me take any notice of it, and has gone his rounds just the same as usual, though I'm sure he's more fit for his bed than to be out of doors."

"But what do you think is the matter with him, Long?" demanded the Canon.

"I can't say, I'm sure, sir, but the doctor has been very low in his spirits, for some weeks

past, as perhaps you may have observed, and I shouldn't wonder myself if a fever or something of that sort was coming on him."

"Well! the doctor ought to know his own symptoms best," observed Canon Prowse, "and if he refuses to take any notice of them, I can't see what is to be done about it."

"I thought, perhaps, sir," said Long, twisting his hat round and round in his hands, "that if Mrs. Prowse would be good enough to speak to Dr. Nash on the subject he might be able to persuade my master to take more care of himself."

"Oh! I'm sure that wouldn't be of any use," replied Mrs. Prowse in her imperative manner. "Your master knows twice as much as Dr. Nash, and is not likely to take *his* advice. But I'll step round at dinner-time this evening, Long, and see what's the matter with him myself."

Long bowed and withdrew, though he had little hope that a woman's advice would have much influence with his master.

When Mrs. Prowse entered the dining-room of No. 15, at the time appointed, she found her brother looking much worse than she had anticipated. But to her repeated inquiries as to what ailed him, he pettishly re-

plied that it was nothing, that he had only a pain in his shoulder and back, which as likely as not proceeded from rheumatism.

"Oh! I hope you are not going to have rheumatic fever, James!" she exclaimed; "you seem so restless and uncomfortable to me, and your face is so flushed that I shouldn't at all wonder if it were the case."

"I wish you'd stop your confounded croaking!" he said angrily; "it's enough to make a man ill to hear the way in which you go on."

The wine and dessert were on the table, but she observed that he sat with his back towards them, and was not drinking or eating as usual.

"Are you not going to take any wine, James?"

He rose then, but as though with an effort, and pouring out some sherry, attempted to raise it to his lips. But the next moment he dashed the wine-glass to the ground, and flew to the opposite side of the room, panting for breath and in a state apparently of the greatest terror.

Mrs. Prowse perceiving this action with much alarm, followed and attempted to soothe him, but he beat her off with his hands, and sank down on a sofa, gasping with agitation.

"James! what *is* the matter with you?" she exclaimed; "you must be very ill to go on like this. Let me send for Dr. Nash, or Mr. Young. You may do yourself serious harm by delaying to take advice."

"Leave me alone!" he answered in a harsh, thick voice, which was utterly unlike his own. "I want no doctors, or advice. There is nothing the matter with me, I tell you, and all I wish for is to be left to myself."

"Oh! if that is the case, of course I will go," said Mrs. Prowse, always but too ready to take offence; "but if you suffer for your negligence don't blame *me*, that's all. Good-night to you!" And quitting the room, she returned to her own house. Meanwhile the wretched man whom she had left grew so much worse, that before she had retired to rest, she received a second visit from Long, who with an expression of fear entreated her to summon Dr. Nash to his master's aid, or to authorise him to do so.

"I am sure he ought to see somebody, ma'am, and that at once, for he's been rolling his head about in the curiousest manner all the evening, and stammering as though he couldn't find his tongue."

"Well, you must send for Dr. Nash, then,

and on your own responsibility, Long," snapped the affectionate sister, "for *I* don't intend to interfere again until I'm asked. I offered to do what I could for your master this afternoon, and he refused my services altogether. You must act as you think best, for I will not venture to give you any authority in the matter."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Long, respectfully, though inappropriately; "then I *will* send for the other gentlemen, for I can't feel easy until I hear what their opinion of the case may be."

Accordingly, on pretence of transacting business of his own, Long crept out that evening to Dr. Nash's house, and furnished him with such an account of Dr. Monkton's symptoms as brought him at once to St. Bartholomew's Street.

But Mrs. Prowse did not go near her brother during the whole of the following day. He had offended her, and she desired he should learn that to do so was no slight thing.

On the morning of the day after, however, as she was passing the door of her husband's study, her curiosity was excited by hearing the sound of more than one strange voice

within it; and she immediately stooped down to the keyhole to hear what they were talking about. Mrs. Prowse was not particular about using such simple expedients to gain her ends.

"I think that Mrs. Prowse should be informed of her brother's danger," said a voice, which she recognised as that of Dr. Nash.

"You think then, gentlemen, that the case is urgent," remarked her husband.

"Most decidedly so," was the reply from some stranger, "more than urgent, imminent, next to hopeless."

Then she was about to bustle in, eager for further intelligence, when, before she could resume an upright position, the door was suddenly thrown open. What the men thought of her, caught in the very act of listening to their conference, matters little; their minds were occupied at the moment with a subject of so much greater importance, that perhaps they never thought of her at all.

"My dear!" exclaimed the Canon, "these gentlemen were just enquiring for you. They have brought sad news with them, Matilda."

"Relating to my brother?" she asked, quickly.

"I regret to answer yes," replied Dr. Nash.

"What is the matter with him, doctor? Is it rheumatic fever, or scarlet fever, or what? I saw him the day before yesterday, and then he behaved in the most extraordinary manner to me."

"I am afraid you would think his actions still more extraordinary now," said her informant. "He is very ill, very ill indeed. Can you throw your thoughts back, Mrs. Prowse, to a night in last November, when, as I understand, Mr. Robert Brooke, the young gentleman lately dead, left your brother's house?"

"To be sure I can; but what of that?"

"On that night or morning," continued Dr. Nash, "Monkton shot a dog, I believe—a mastiff which lay upon the landing."

"Yes! a nasty, dangerous brute, which young Brooke had brought in on purpose to annoy him. But what possible connection can that circumstance have with his present illness?"

"We fear it has too much. Did Dr. Monton ever tell you that the animal had bitten him?"

"Yes! now you mention it, he did. The dog seized his fingers as he was about to muzzle him, but the bites were scarcely to be

called such. They were mere scratches, and healed directly."

Dr. Nash turned to the stranger, an eminent physician, whom he had summoned from London to his assistance.

"This account coincides with that of the servant," he remarked. "I greatly fear that your suspicions are correct."

"They are no longer suspicions with me," replied the other, "they are certainties."

"But what are you alluding to?" asked Mrs. Prowse, whose curiosity was all alive. "You cannot mean to tell me that those little wounds can have any effect upon my brother's health at this distance of time. Why, it happened nearly three months ago."

"That makes no difference," said the stranger, "the question is, in what state was the dog when shot?"

"Oh! I know nothing about the dog," replied Mrs. Prowse, hastily.

"We do, unfortunately, madam," he rejoined, "we have enquired, and have every reason to dread that rabies, though perhaps undeveloped, was in its system at the time."

At this surmise, which could not but convey a fearful meaning, even to a disinterested listener, the heart of the Canon's wife seemed

suddenly to stand still, and her face grew pale as ashes.

"And in that case?" she gasped.

"In that case, we fear that there can be no mistake about Dr. Monkton's symptons, which all tend to suggest the idea that he is suffering from——"

"Not from—hydrophobia!" shrieked Mrs. Prowse.

The stranger bowed his head.

She fell back on the sofa, unable to articulate, and white with terror.

"But please to understand, my dear lady," said Dr. Nash, "that you must not give a hint of our suspicions to your brother. Soothe him by every means in your power, and try to allay the fear which is evidently creeping on him, that we are enemies instead of friends, but——"

"Oh! I couldn't go to him. I couldn't see him for anything," exclaimed Mrs. Prowse, "it would be the death of me, I know."

"What, not when he so much requires you?" said Dr. Nash. "If any malady needs gentle, soothing care, it must be a fearful one like this."

"But won't he be dangerous?" she urged, "and are you certain it is not catching?"

At this question the doctors could scarcely refrain from smiling, as they assured her to the contrary.

"And he will have his servants with him, and we shall also be in the house," said Dr. Nash; "but if you are really so timid, perhaps you will be of less use than harm."

But reassured as to the danger of her brother biting her, Mrs. Prowse was curious to be upon the scene of action, and almost immediately departed with her husband for St. Bartholomew's Street. On arrival, they were met by Long with a woeful account of the treatment he had undergone at his master's hands.

"He's as untractable to-day, ma'am, as a madman. He took a stick just now and threatened to hit me and John with it, and he won't take a drop of medicine, nor yet go into his bedroom for fear we mean to imprison him. I got him to lie down on the bed just now, for he's had no sleep all night, but he hadn't been here above a minute or two, before he jumped off and ran into the passage, roaring out that he was suffocated, and calling for water in the most violent manner. And when I was bringing the jug along to him, he rushed at it and tried to dip his whole head

in, and when he found he couldn't drink it, he smashed the jug to pieces, and flew at me like a wild thing. I hope the doctors are coming back soon, sir, for I don't half like being left alone with master, and no more will you, I think, when you see him."

"Where is he now, Long?"

"He's sitting on the landing, sir; I can't get him to move from the spot, and he's talking in a way to make one's flesh creep."

Canon Prowse had not seen his brother-in-law then for many days, and he was greatly shocked at his altered appearance. They found him as the man had indicated, sitting on the landing, talking to himself, with damp, matted hair, drawn face, wild, glassy eyes wide open, and dry, parched lips.

"Who is that pouring cold water on my head?" he called out, in accents of pain, as his sister and her husband ascended the stairs, "take these snakes from off me, Long. Clear away those large black things, why do you let them crawl over me in this manner?" and then, as no one appeared to obey his orders, he continued plaintively, "do as I tell you, don't stand there and let me be eaten up alive: whoever saw such animals on English ground?"

"He is raving," whispered Mrs. Prowse to her husband, "he must be delirious."

Yet the next moment he had recognised them both, and his memory did not seem the least impaired, though he talked very slowly, and with the rotatory motion of his head which the servant had before described to them.

"It's a long time since you've been here, Canon. I began to think we should never meet again. We quarrelled on that subject of Robert Brooke and his sister, didn't we? but it's just as well you've come to see me now, for I begin to think that I shan't get over this attack."

But then, as the Canon was about to approach and speak some words of comfort to him, he threw out his arms in the greatest agitation, exclaiming:—

"Don't touch me! don't come near me, for Heaven's sake! If you attempt to touch me I will murder you."

His eyes rolled round again in the wildest manner, and he commenced to mutter and talk incoherently to himself, crying out at intervals: "Don't touch me! In God's name, don't lay a finger on me!"

Mr. and Mrs. Prowse, the one no less

frightened than the other, beat a hasty retreat to the lower rooms, whence, in fear and trembling, they listened to the sick man's broken dialogue with his attendants, until the doctors again made their appearance.

But when they ascended the staircase in their company, they found the scene had changed. The unhappy patient had now conceived the idea that his brother professionals were about to poison him, and had locked himself into his bedroom, and all entreaty on their parts that he should open to them, was only met by the coarsest and most virulent abuse.

The elegant and suave Dr. Monkton, who had never been known in his most impatient moments to say anything ungentlemanly, now levelled a tissue of the vilest language at the heads of his friends, and defied them to enter the room without his consent.

"We can do no earthly good," said the London physician to Dr. Nash, "therefore what is the use of irritating him? Let his servants and his friends pass through if he so wishes it, and we can watch him if we choose through the crack of the door."

Mrs. Prowse could not be persuaded to re-enter her brother's presence, she was too great a coward, and had too little affection for him;

but her husband accompanied Long into his master's bedroom, and was with the miserable man until the end.

He lay on his bed, his eyes and head constantly on the move, whilst he was so irritable that he could not bear to be touched, or even looked at. The idea that he had been poisoned evidently possessed his mind, and he would not attempt to swallow either food or medicine, and often cried out that could he catch a sight of those two doctors, he would murder them.

For the first time now he spoke of the mastiff, and connected his illness with the fact of having been bitten by him.

"The brute!" he exclaimed, "the nasty cowardly brute, to give me my death because I wished to muzzle him; but he had his deserts. I shot him. I shot him dead! But it would have been better, perhaps, if I had waited till Helena coaxed him off the landing. Where is Helena?" suddenly starting up. "Ah! I forgot! she's left me! They've all left me—or—did I make them go? It little matters now, but I am alone, all alone! Keep those two poisoners out of the room!" he shouted, with an oath which rang through the house, "if I catch sight of either of them again, I'll murder them as I did the mastiff."

Another night passed : a long weary night, during which he grew suddenly tractable, and talked sensibly for some time, but still complained of intense thirst (as he had done all along) and of great pain in his shoulder. His brother-in-law tried, more than once, to lead his thoughts to something higher than the things of earth, but his efforts were of no avail. Each time the subject was alluded to, Dr. Monkton's face put on a sardonic smile, which seemed to say the time was past for his conversion, until the good Canon gave up the attempt in despair.

As night approached, his sister had gone home to her bed. She could be of no earthly use to him, she had argued, and she saw no reason in giving up her rest for nothing. So she slept soundly, doubtless, whilst James Monkton's life was ebbing painfully away, with no one at his side who loved him, or would mourn his dreadful death.

Canon Prowse was home himself before his wife had risen from her bed, and waked her with the news that her brother had departed.

"He became weaker every minute of the night," he said, in relating the occurrence, "and we hardly thought he could have lasted till the morning. At six o'clock he asked

Long for some tea, but when it was brought to him, he only shuddered at the sight, and turned away. Soon afterwards, he raised himself in bed ; I thought he was about to speak to me, and think so still, but before he could articulate a word, he fell back on his pillow and expired."

"Oh ! my dear brother !" shrieked Mrs. Prowse, in her most effective treble. "Oh ! my dear, dear brother, this is a judgment on those wicked Brookes, for if it hadn't been for them and for their horrid dog, he might have been alive and well this day. Oh ! my dear brother, James ! my only brother, James ! what shall I do without him ?" but finding that her lamentations increased in vehemence, until they were becoming patent to the entire household, Canon Prowse abruptly but judiciously closed the door upon them, and left his partner to weep and bewail her brother by herself.

* * * * *

There remains little more of this homely story to relate.

The reason of Dr. Monkton's death, although hushed up as much as possible by his relatives, could not but get wind in such a place as Hilstone, and Mrs. Prowse soon found, to her

horror, that her brother's mantle was supposed in some mysterious manner to have fallen upon her, and that she was shunned by several of the residents, under the supposition that she was hydrophobic; but a greater misfortune befel her before long. Miss Laura Filmer, who had always entertained a predilection for the red-coats, took it into her head to run away with a subaltern of the 40th Bays, and as she had kept all her appointments with the gentleman under the pretence of visiting Mrs. Prowse, her mother chose to believe that the Canon's wife had really had something to do with the elopement, and cut her accordingly, upon which Hilstone, no longer dazzled by the glamour of cathedral fame, opened its eyes, and taking her simply for what she was, an ill-tempered, snappish, spiteful little woman, permitted her at once to drop into her proper place, and become—what she deserved to be —nothing.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Brooke had married her Major, and gone out to India with him; and Nigel, averse to the prospect of again leaving his native land, had disposed of his interest in the Calcutta business, and became a landed proprietor in Scotland instead.

When Nelly was first told of her husband's

death, it seemed to affect her as little as did everything else. No thought of release from a chain which galled her, or dreams of a future which she might now indulge, entered her head. She had not felt the chain; she did not believe in the future; but one idea possessed her—that she was on her road to Bertie.

Day after day she would linger by his grave, and in the haunts which had been theirs together: she did not avoid the mention of his name, but she resented, as an insult, any supposition that they should long be parted. All his selfishness, his indolence, his disregard of her convenience, had faded from her mind. She could remember nothing but the mournful beauty of his countenance, and the love which had been theirs. She thanked Heaven each night that she was one day nearer to his side; she almost grudged the meat and drink which kept her life in her, and herself from him.

But it was not right, and it was not natural that such a state of things should last. Little by little, though loath at first to part with her persuasion, Nelly came to comprehend that this world might still hold something pleasurable for her, even though Bertie lay in his grave.

Nigel Brooke was not slow to make his ap-

pearance at Little Bickton, as soon as he learnt that his wooing might be renewed, and try to convince her of the truth, and as soon as the twelvemonth had elapsed since Dr. Monkton's death, he married his cousin, and took her off to Scotland with him.

But here let me confess that happiness was not all at once their portion. They loved each other dearly. Nigel Brooke anticipated every desire of his wife, and Nelly looked up to her husband with an affection which had so much reverence mingled with it, as almost to be worship. And yet, notwithstanding the devotion which she exhibited towards himself, and the interest which she evidently took in all the beauties of her new home, a quiet, subdued melancholy seemed to pervade every feeling and tone down every pleasure.

She was still as frank and trusting as she had ever been; she said that she could never express to him one half the gratitude she felt for his affection, and yet even whilst she spoke thus, her soft blue eyes would wander to the sky, and she seemed to remember that her home below was but a temporary thing.

She was as loving and as innocent as of old, but she was not the same Nelly that she had

been at Little Bickton and at Orpington ; her look had lost its brightness and her voice its ring, and she was for ever reminding her husband, by her chastened demeanour, that a great sorrow had passed over her young life.

Nigel had hoped for more than this ; he had trusted that their mutual love and all the pleasures with which it was in his power to surround her, would have restored to her fourfold the happiness which had been so cruelly blighted.

He was disappointed — bitterly disappointed ; and, after a little while, he told her so.

"Dearest Nigel," she replied, "I am so grieved to hear you say it. I have everything that heart can wish for—indeed I have. But don't you think the fault lies in your hoping for too much ? If we are contented in this world, what more can we desire ? There is no such thing as happiness below—and it is only the very young who expect to find it here. *I* did so once, I suppose from sheer ignorance of what life is, but I am wiser now, and have learned to be content with what Heaven sends me."

"Then my love has no power to make you happy, Nelly ?" said Nigel, mournfully.

"I *am* happy, dearest husband," she replied,

"quite happy, and perfectly content;" and then her quiet, loving glance met his own, without a flash of light in it, and left him as disappointed as before.

Yet she was so good—so entirely unselfish and devoted, that he could not blame her, even in his thoughts.

And it came at last. Happiness rushed in upon them both, in a rich bright stream, which flowed all the stronger from having been delayed awhile.

It was on a spring morning—a day ever afterwards remembered by Nigel Brooke as the commencement of an unbroken vista of happy, cloudless years—that he was summoned to see his wife, for the first time, with baby on her breast.

"Oh! husband!" she exclaimed, drawing down his head, until it rested beside that of his new-born son, "oh! dearest husband, how could I ever be so wicked as to say that contentment was all we dare hope for in this world, when the memory of your patient, faithful love, borne in upon me at an hour like this, is happiness too great to be expressed, except in the same breath as thanks to Heaven."

And though by this time, her children are fast growing up around her, and her hair may

even here and there be streaked with grey, and neither Bertie's life nor love are things forgotten, it is not too much to affirm that in all the fair broad land of Scotland, there is not a happier wife nor blither mother than dear NELLY BROOKE.

THE END.

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